AN UNEXPECTED ALLIANCE:
THE LAYTON-PACEY CORRESPONDENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a scholarly edition of the correspondence between the Canadian poet Irving Layton and the critic and historian of Canadian literature, Desmond Pacey; on November 3, 1954, Desmond Pacey wrote to Contact Press, inviting the poets Irving Layton, Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster to submit their recent work for discussion in an article on Canadian literature for The International Year Book. Pacey and Layton met in Montreal a few months later, and so began a long friendship and a lengthy correspondence which continued until Pacey's death on July 4, 1975. The correspondence is an extremely important document in the history of Canadian poetry and criticism in the decisive decades following World War II because it so directly and extensively explores the crucial issues of the times: the function of the poet and the critic in contemporary society; the debate over a "cosmopolitan" versus a "native" aesthetic; the debate over a "mythopoeic" versus a "realist" approach to the creation of, and criticism of, poetry; and the attempt to define a position for the Jewish writer in a gentile society. But aside from this prolonged and invaluable theoretical discourse, and aside from the countless useful insights into the life and work of practically every writer active in Canada between 1954-1975, the letters between the two men are important
because the two men were so vitally important to the
development of a viable Canadian literature.

The basic principle of this project's editorial
philosophy is the decision to abjure the "editorial
pedantries" of the diplomatic text which tend to exclude
the non-specialist educated public, and to assume greater
flexibility in the standardization and regularization of
spelling, punctuation, capitalization, abbreviation and
matters of format--placement of addresses, closings,
postscripts and marginalia. Headnotes contain all textual
information about the letter; transcriptions are in the main
literal, but in the interest of consistency some
standardization has been imposed. Footnotes follow each
letter; cross-references are by letter and, where
applicable, note number; when the reference is to a letter
with a single footnote, no number is cited. These almost
three thousand annotations are employed to identify
individuals referred to in the text, to provide publication
information on the works of Layton, Pacey, and numerous
other individuals referred to in the text, to document and
frequently quote from the reviews, articles, radio and
television programs they discuss, to elucidate references to
current events, and to provide miscellaneous but necessary
background information on matters ranging from the private
lives of the two correspondents to major events and issues
in the history of Canadian literature.
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AN UNEXPECTED ALLIANCE: THE LAYTON-PACEY CORRESPONDENCE

INTRODUCTION

To begin with Columbus. In 1962 John Robert Colombo ("I call him Columbus because he discovered my genius" Layton letter 421), reporting in the Canadian Forum on the Student Writer's Conference, noted the impact of "an unexpected alliance of Irving Layton and Dr. Pacey...taking on all comers."¹ The characterization of their alliance as "unexpected" puzzled the two men who had been close friends for seven years (Layton 427, Pacey 429; all numbers refer to the number of letter in this edition), but presumably Colombo was alluding simply to the frequently-presumed polarities of poet and critic. Indeed, discourse between
poet and critic encodes both the essential nature and ultimate value of the record of their relationship, the over seven hundred letters they wrote to each other: Layton sends Pacey drafts of his poems "hot off the griddle," and communicates his aspirations, projects, upcoming periodical appearances, and opinions of the work of his contemporaries; Pacey responds with detailed criticism, enthusiasm and approbation. Not only does Layton send over one hundred and fifty poems as enclosures with the letters, but many of the letters are written on the backs of poems or in the margins of poems, suggesting that the poet's epistles to Pacey are themselves, in a sense, poems in disguise: "my nasty postcards are simply misunderstood poems" (Layton 80); "I hope you do realize that my 'megalomaniacal' letters are meant as spoofs...bad or incomplete poems written in a dry season" (Layton 623). The subject of the longest-standing debate in the text is the relationship between poet and critic; Layton sees this association as one of dependency--"a dog and his flea" (38), while Pacey consistently asserts the value of the critic as a creative being in his own right, amending Layton's metaphor to "a racing greyhound and a seeing-eye dog" (43). In early 1965, when they were planning to publish an edition of the first ten years of their correspondence (Layton 531, Pacey 533), "Poet and Critic" was the title they chose.

Aside from suggesting this basic dichotomy of poet and critic, Colombo's offhand reference to "an unexpected
"alliance" is valuable as an entrée to a discussion of the correspondence because the alliance between the two men appears, in retrospect, intensely unexpected and expected. Close in age and literary affinities (both admired the honesty and passion which distinguishes the work of W.B. Yeats and D.H. Lawrence), they favoured literature which was earthy in tone and realistic in style, and valued, in their personal relations, candour, exuberance, and loyalty. At their first meeting, they both intuited that a significant and lasting friendship was to ensue: "It was grand seeing you at last and spending a few delightful hours together. Fred [Cogswell] and I agreed that that afternoon with you was the best part of the whole trip" (Pacey 2); "It's been a long time since I felt so completely at home with anyone...the kind one can talk to from the heart" (Layton 3). Over the years, their intimacy knew no bounds:

We're as alike as two peas in a pod (Layton 161)
I love you like a brother (Pacey 224, Layton 602)
My friendship with you is one of the brightest spots in my life (Pacey 398)

With no one else did I have so prolonged and uninterrupted a correspondence as with yourself, to no one did I write so intimately. Since there was never any thought in my mind of these letters being published, or of them being seen by anyone but you, I wrote whatever came into my mind, or my heart and the moment dictated. (Layton 536)

I love you like a brother--more! (Layton 223).

Their friendship lasted twenty years. Although their fraternity of the last ten years lacks the urgency of their
partnership during the late 1950s and early 1960s, when both men were struggling to establish their careers, their shared enthusiasms and enthusiasm for each other's work never wavered.

It was the differences between the two men which sparked their friendship and energized their correspondence. In fact, an essential and elusive difference is a recurrent topic: "There is certainly a difference in outlook and temperament between us, and I'm trying desperately to define it" (Layton 234); "I think we have both been repeatedly wounded by & in life, but we have reacted in almost opposite ways" (Pacey 239); "There's a blind spot in you somewhere" (Layton 499); "I feel that we are basically different in our responses to the world about us" (Pacey 609). Their consciousness of this contrariety is encoded in their tendency to see themselves as legendary odd couples—Don Quixote and Sancho Panza (Layton 211), Falstaff and Prince Hal (Layton 326), cat and mouse (Pacey 474). Their awareness of their differences can also be seen in their frank delight in the friction between them: "Believe me, I love you all the more for exploding like that" (Layton 159); "I like ragging you" (Layton 185); "we have the most fun when we're fighting" (Pacey 247); "I enjoy our epistolary arguments as much as you do--perhaps a great deal more" (Layton 474). A flurry of "brickbats and insults" is always mixed in with the shower of "hugs and kisses."

Miscommunication becomes a dominant trope in the text, with
misdated letters and missed dedications (of Layton poems to Pacey), misunderstandings and outright arguments ("the usual Irving-Desmond gerfuffle," Pacey 629), and rendezvous gone wrong (the missed meetings at Montreal station are so very frequent that at one time this edition was tentatively titled "Closely Missed Trains").

This motif of difference in the text—of difference coexistant with affinity—springs largely from obvious sources of diversity and yet similarity in vocation, background and outlook:

*poet and critic* but a poet who also publishes seminal criticism of Klein, and, here in the letters, appears as a perceptive critic of the poetry of his peers, and a critic who publishes children's poetry and short stories

*Romanian and New Zealander* by birth, but both passionate Canadians—"For God's sake don't leave the country, we need you" (Pacey 276); "this country, for all its faults, is worth fighting for" (Pacey 572)—who share a lingering sense of the immigrant

*lapsed Jew and devout Christian* but a Jew who titles one of his collections *For My Brother Jesus*, and who tells his gentile friend, "though you're a goy, you've got a Jewish heart" (573)
"city mouse and country mouse" (Layton 602)——Layton lived in Montreal at the hub of Canadian literature in the decisive decades of the fifties and sixties but Pacey was marginalized in the Maritimes, in Fredericton, "a backwater town where on cold, clear nights one can hear the bears fart" (605), as Layton teases him, while Pacey himself frequently complains about the hegemony "of the Ottawa-Toronto-Montreal triangle" (343) in Canadian letters. But a city mouse whose whirlwind of speaking and social engagements makes him feel like "Sisyphus" (618), and the "Sorcerer's Apprentice" (171, 605), and a country mouse wise enough to see that the margins provide a unique perspective (355). This difference is also mitigated by both men's frequent national and international travel.

Lothario and monogamous family man but a philanderer who envies the other's fidelity (Layton 541), and appears in the correspondence as a devoted and tender father, and a family man who imagines himself "Don Juan" (Pacey 545), "the Ginger Man of Fredericton" (Pacey 427), and "a lecher with a love on every wind" (Pacey 543)—a Layton-Pacey get-together was incomplete without a visit to a Montreal strip club.

hawk and dove/ pro-American and Anglophile/ "crypto-Fascist" (Pacey 365) and "Pinky Pacey" (Layton 366)
—political differences are the source of great
dissension in the text as the correspondents discuss
such post-War crises as Suez, Hungary, Cuba and
Vietnam; Layton consistently applauds aggressive
American foreign policy while Pacey deplores it, but
Pacey temporarily shares Layton's enthusiasm for
President John F. Kennedy (467), and publicly admits
his admiration for the American tradition in Purdy's
The New Romans ("My Thoughts on Americans and the
USA")2), and both pray for peace in the Western world
while paradoxically agreeing that the Western tradition
of individual liberty entails constant conflict: "For
me, the West means endless exploration, conflict,
novelty" (Layton 216).

Despite their tendency to get their "wires crossed"
(Layton 571), to speak at "cross purposes" (Pacey 529),
Layton and Pacey accept their mutual differences: "I love
you the way you are, but that doesn't mean that I can't spot
your weak spots" (Pacey 473). Once accepted, differences
can be beneficial: "Your letters mean a very great deal to
me; your patience and good-humoured needling of my 'artistic
pretensions' are medicine to my soul" (Layton 234); "You've
been very good for me, and I've learned much—at least I
hope I have—from your wisdom, patience, humility" (Layton
573). Layton repeatedly sees this benefit in therapeutic
terms: "Your correspondence with me over the years, your
friendship and concern help greatly to keep me sane. I say this in simple gratitude" (533). He also remarks in the final letter he wrote to Pacey, received just days before Pacey’s death on July 4, 1975:

I recall that once I sent you one of my ‘nasty specials’—the nastiness wasn’t directed at yourself but at others or at the world—and you wrote back that there were aspects of me that weren’t as attractive as some other aspects were. The rebuff stung me at the time...It stung but it was as beneficial as an anti-tetanus injection. It made me take a closer look at myself and to be on my guard against those rages which brought me sometimes very near to madness itself. (726)

This final "medicine" from his old friend cheered Pacey’s final days but was unable to change the course of his cancer.

Mary Pacey sent a telegram to Layton in Greece the day Desmond Pacey died. Layton replied on July 12, 1975 (the final letter in this edition), mourning their shared loss, enclosing his elegy for Pacey, "Desmond Pacey: In Memoriam,"³ declaring his intention to dedicate his next volume, For My Brother Jesus, to Pacey, and praising his late friend: "He was a beautiful man with a rare mixture of compassion, insight, magnanimity and humour whose continuing friendship and loyalty helped me when my own psychic underpinnings seemed to be slipping away from me" (727). Perhaps the key to the "unexpected" alliance of Irving Layton and Desmond Pacey is that they forced their differences to become creative differences. Layton states
this explicitly in his final letter in this edition written to console Mary Pacey:

Desmond doesn’t need any memorials by me or by anyone else, having built his own but I want the dedication to be a testimonial to a wonderful friendship which endured for so long and was so creative. Perhaps in an age where words like love, creativity and friendship have seemingly gone out of circulation, the record of our friendship will provide some people with comfort and hope. (727)

Poets and critics do not require conventional memorials because their true memorials are the books they create; this edition then is both a memorial to, and the record of, a remarkable friendship between poet and critic. An alliance which was unexpected, perhaps, but never unfailing or unappreciated.

* * * * * * * * * *

On November 3, 1954, Desmond Pacey wrote to Contact Press, inviting the poets Irving Layton, Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster to send him their recent books for an article on Canadian literature he was planning for The International Year Book. Pacey and Layton met in Montreal a few months later, and so began a long friendship and a lengthy correspondence which continued until Pacey’s death on July 4, 1975. The correspondence is an important document in the history of Canadian poetry and criticism in the decisive decades following World War II because it so
directly and extensively explores the crucial issues of the times: the function of the poet and the critic in contemporary society; the question of a "cosmopolitan" versus a "native" aesthetic, terms A.J.M. Smith advanced in his influential anthology The Book of Canadian Poetry to delineate two traditions in Canadian literature; the debate over a Northrop Frye-inspired "mythopoeic" school versus a "realist" approach to the creation of, and criticism of, poetry; and the attempt to define a post-modern sensibility. Repeatedly in his letters of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Layton expresses his dissatisfaction with the literary ideal of the "well-wrought urn" of the modernists: "Taoism has penetrated the contemporary consciousness of the West--an appreciation of the incomplete, of flux. We're through with poems like Keats' 'Ode To A Grecian Urn'; we want an unending line, preferably broken and at times invisible, rather than circles that hint at the perfection of death" (Layton 507). But in addition to this prolonged and invaluable theoretical discourse, as well as the many useful insights into the life and work of practically every writer active in Canada between 1954-1975, the letters between the two men are important because the two men were so vitally important to the development of a viable Canadian literature.

Desmond Pacey was born in 1917 in Dunedin, New Zealand, shortly after his father had been killed in World War I. In 1924 he and his mother emigrated to England; in 1931 they
emigrated again, to Canada, where his mother married a farmer in Glanford Station, near Hamilton, Ontario. In 1934 in his final year at Caledonia High School, Pacey won three entrance scholarships to the University of Toronto. Graduating in 1938, Pacey was awarded the Massey Travelling Fellowship for study at Cambridge University. He received his doctorate from Cambridge in 1941, the topic of his dissertation being "The Reception and Influence of French Realistic Fiction in Victorian England." Upon his return to Canada in 1940, Desmond Pacey (1917-75) lived, as George Woodcock said, "astonishingly parallel lives in the academic and literary worlds." After four years teaching at Brandon College of the University of Manitoba, he moved in 1944 to Fredericton, New Brunswick, to become Head of the Department of English there. He quickly began building a reputation for his department as one of the most dynamic in Canada and a place where the study of Canadian literature (at that time, highly uncommon) was encouraged. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, he travelled to Canadian universities as a popular speaker in the cause of his adopted country's literature. His involvement in the field of Canadian literature was direct and extensive: as fiction editor of The Fiddlehead he helped transform a mimeographed poetry newsletter into one of the most respected literary magazines in Canada; he regularly invited Canadian poets and novelists to visit Fredericton and give readings there; and he carried on a voluminous correspondence with such diverse Canadian
writers as Ethel Wilson, F.R. Scott, Dorothy Livesay, Al Purdy and Norman Levine. He began to publish short stories in Canadian periodicals, many of which were later translated and appeared in German magazines and newspapers. But his greatest achievement was as a scholar and critic of Canadian literature. As early as 1945 he argued for the importance of Frederick Philip Grove as a writer worthy of detailed critical attention, and his *Creative Writing in Canada* (1952) and *Ten Canadian Poets* (1958) achieved great authority among students as pioneer guidebooks for the systematic study of Canadian literature. He was one of the first to call for scholarly editions of the works and correspondence of Canadian writers ("Areas of Research in Canadian Literature," 1954). Many of the projects he worked on in his later years, before death so prematurely cut short his career, published posthumously, demonstrate that he took this dictum to heart: *The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove* (1976), *The Collected Poems of Charles G.D. Roberts* (1985), and *The Letters of Charles G.D. Roberts* (1989). As the second edition of the *Literary History of Canada* states in its "Dedication" to Desmond Pacey: "His prestige as a literary historian stands, as it should, very high, and his role as a happy warrior for recognition of Canadian culture will long be remembered with gratitude in the nation he served so well."5

The literary career of Irving Layton (b. 1912) began in earnest in the 1940s as well, when he was associated with
Louis Dudek and John Sutherland in the editing of First Statement (1942-45), a controversial magazine that later merged with its rival, Preview, to become Northern Review (1946-56). Layton came to Montreal with his parents, who had emigrated from Romania in 1913, one year after his birth. He received a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from Macdonald College in 1939 and a Master of Arts in Political Science from McGill in 1946. His first volume of poetry, Here and Now, appeared in 1945, followed by Now Is the Place (1948) and The Black Huntsmen (1952). In 1952 he joined Dudek and Raymond Souster in the founding of the influential Contact Press. Since then Layton has taught, travelled, written and edited books, read his poetry on campuses across the country—indeed, around the world—and been an active commentator on current affairs, becoming the best-known and most controversial figure in Canadian literature until the mid-eighties. Recognized early in his poetic career as a unique and powerful voice, Irving Layton has had an enormous influence over the last five decades; he truly was at the creative centre of a renaissance in poetry in this country. In the sixties he, along with Leonard Cohen and Al Purdy, emerged as the leading figures in a movement to make poetry accessible to Canadians and relevant to the changing times. Despite the controversy that has surrounded Layton and his work, most, if not all critics of Canadian literature would concur with his biographer, Elspeth Cameron, when she says that Layton has "written
fifteen world class poems that could stand with the best poetry in modern English." Cameron is here echoing George Woodcock’s observation in his review article on Layton’s *Collected Poems* of 1965, "A Grab at Proteus: Notes on Irving Layton":

After my several readings, I made a list of the poems which still seemed to me complete and moving achievements; there were thirty-five of them. The whole volume contains 385 poems, and thus one poem in every eleven aroused either my delight or my extreme admiration; this left Layton with a better score than most of the poets now writing in either North America or Britain.

This tendency to qualify praise of Layton’s work by referring to concepts of quantity is common among Layton’s contemporary critics. Unable to see beyond a presumed decline in his ouevre, they praise the familiar "anthology pieces" of the late fifties and early sixties while simultaneously restricting his achievement as a poet to those "fifteen" or "thirty-five" poems. Aside from the obvious absurdity of introducing notions of quantity into a discussion of poetry, such an approach is simply wrong-headed for a number of reasons. Anthologists are influential in establishing a canon of poetry for their time, but the poems they select are always altered by succeeding generations. My own favorites from volumes such as *In the Midst of My Fever* (1954), *The Cold Green Element* (1955) *The Bull Calf and Other Poems* (1956), volumes that were the envy of William Carlos Williams, Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, Cid Corman, Hugh Kenner and others, rarely
coincide with those of the anthologists; the quality of verse is consistent in these volumes. The entire question of decline is also troublesome: to what extent is the notion of decline based upon the unpopularity of Layton’s politics and his sexual politics? To what extent is Eli Mandel’s thesis valid that Layton has become an increasingly satiric, as opposed to lyric poet in an age which does not appreciate satire? Critics who complain of the unevenness of the later Layton often fail to note that these volumes contain at least a few poems that rank with his earlier achievement (i.e. "Shakespeare" in the 1971 volume *Nail Polish* and "Tide" in *Lovers and Lesser Men* of 1973). Finally, all such criticism rests upon imposing a paradigm—the poet who continues developing and ripening until death (such a creature is extremely rare; one thinks of W.B. Yeats and one or two others)—upon every poet and measuring his "success" or "failure" in comparison. A far more common pattern—especially in Canadian poetry—is the poet who produces a brilliant first book and falls into silence or a mawkish imitation of this first success (i.e. the mythopoeic Macpherson and Reaney). Layton’s later career has been anything but silent. Clearly we should celebrate the appearance of poetic genius whatever arc its comet follows; it is hoped this edition will play some part in the re-evaluation of Layton’s achievement as a Canadian world-class poet.
Layton and Pacey shared ambivalent feelings towards the "first generation of modernists" who introduced the international literary style to Canada; both felt that the work of Smith, Scott, and Klein represented a transplanted English idiom, favouring detachment and English voices and rhythms rather than an engaged and authentically North American style. In a fascinating series of letters written in 1956, when Pacey was working on his landmark *Ten Canadian Poets*, the two men debated the strengths and weaknesses of Pratt, Scott, Smith, Birney and Klein.

Layton, for example, tells Pacey an anecdote ("a revealing item that should speak volumes to you") concerning a conversation he had with Smith, in which the elder poet told Layton he "would never use "Marie" and "De Bullion Street" in *The Blasted Pine*...too raw, you know," to which Layton mockingly adds "The Blasted Pine indeed!" (5). Smith and Scott's *The Blasted Pine* was subtitled "An Anthology of Satire and Disrespectful Verse"; clearly Layton's poems like "De Bullion Street" with its comparison of a "corner mission" and a "walled church" to "haemorrhoids on the city's anus" were too disrespectful for their tastes. The incident is emblematic of the contrast between the satire of savage indignation favoured by the First Statement group and the urbane, witty mode favored by the group who initiated *The McGill Fortnightly Review* in the twenties. Whereas the latter question, but ultimately accept the anglo-Protestant norms of propriety which had dominated Canadian culture, the
former deliberately contravene this hegemony. The series of bristling epistles from Layton reveal both vitriol and a grudging respect for the preceding generation of Canadian poets:

Smith’s passion is more for literature than life. How very little of the real turmoil of the world he has gotten into his verse! Have you noticed the almost complete absence of confusion in the verse of that generation? Smith, Klein, Scott, Birney, Pratt, each of them had his own tower with a protective moat around it. Smith’s classicism, Klein’s Zionism, Scott’s socialism, Birney had himself, the bleakness of that diluted with a vague humanitarianism, Pratt his monsters. But there’s one trouble with moats (imagine Pratt’s monsters swimming about in a moat!), it keeps life away from your doors. Note too how little of themselves they get into their verse—for me that’s the giveaway, the fatal clue. The poet’s gift to the world is himself, though he may wrap that self up in all kinds of different vestments. The exception is Klein; nevertheless the "I" in Klein is the hurt boy whose faith (Jewish Orthodoxy) was taken away from him. It’s precisely because there is an "I" in Klein, however windy, feeble and romantic he is, that puts him slightly ahead of Scott, Birney, and Smith. (63)

Characteristically, Layton revises and softens his critique of the work of the first generation of Canadian modernists, by adding the cautionary remark, "Remember, I cut my poetic teeth on these men."

As is well known, the alliance of John Sutherland, Layton and Louis Dudek of the 1940s fractured in the 1950s: John Sutherland converted to Roman Catholicism and denounced the poetry which he had once championed. Later, in 1958, Louis Dudek split with Layton after labelling his recent verse "well-nigh demented poetry." The correspondence details Layton’s intimate reactions to each defection. He views Sutherland’s conversion as a failure of the will, and
he sees Sutherland's aesthetic opinions—that the realist movement of the forties was "in a state of decay," that the contemporary writer must reject "modern literary decadence" and return to religious faith—as the misguided beliefs of an intellectual coward who could not cope with the complexity of modern life.

The break with Dudek, who had for years been Layton's closest friend, was more personally devastating. In an article entitled "Patterns of Recent Canadian Poetry" (Culture, XIX, No. 4, December, 1958), Dudek dismissed the work of the leading Canadian poets as "fundamentally disturbed" and singled out Layton's work in particular. A year later, Dudek continued the attack in his review of A Red Carpet for the Sun (Delta, No. 9, Oct.-Dec., 1959) in which he stated that "Layton, it seems, has graduated from Canada's most neglected poet to the most over-rated poet anywhere." Layton's outraged response "An Open Letter to Louis Dudek" (Cataract, Winter, 1962), displays the depth of his pain and anger. In fact, it was partly in response to these feuds that Layton was so elated to find in Pacey an ally who likewise felt that poetry must directly and honestly engage the extremes of human experience, that it must valorize passion and spontaneity over allusion and intellect, that it must involve the physical and the emotional aspects of man as well as the intellectual.

The alliance with Pacey was to grow increasingly strong during the late fifties and early sixties when the
"mythopoeic school"—self-appointed disciples of the critic Northrop Frye, such as Jay Macpherson and James Reaney—threatened to gain ascendancy on the Canadian literary scene. On December 12, 1961, Layton described himself and Pacey as "the horses of realism" ranged against the fastidious formalisms of, first, Smith, and now Frye and his "mythopoeic school" of poets. Layton repeatedly views Frye's dominance as a continuation of Smith's earlier paramountcy as critic and anthologist:

The Long Pea-Shooter is a genuine touchstone: as long as the Smiths, Fryes and "who-nots" are against it, I'll go on believing that criticism in Canada has not emancipated itself from the "genteel tradition" and that the profs, the older ones anyway, have refused to acknowledge the changing Zeitgeist. (5)

Had I taken Frye's strictures seriously, or for that matter, A.J.M. Smith's, I should have folded up years ago. Luckily, I felt their criticism was hostile to the Canadian evolving experience, and was so because it was a variant of the Brahmanism of the New England of the '90s of the last century. This is going to be an abiding problem in this country's intellectual life because of the deep division which exists here between the elite and the mass media-fed philistines. The pallid excretions of Reaney and Macpherson, poems totally unrelated to the contemporary world, obscure university-corridor jokes in verse, the intellectual arrogance of academic sterility and fear of life, a desiccation of the emotions and finally Silence, so I see the evolution of that wing of Canadian poetry. (278)

Both men admired Frye's "brilliance" (Pacey, 110) but believed his criticism lacked imaginative engagement:

His book The Anatomy of Criticism is both brilliant and suggestive—I have read chapters in it with feelings approaching something like awe—
but it finally boils down to something like an irrelevancy. It's not intellect that makes poetry but emotion, a mysterious sixth sense, and that's where Frye's middle finger is lacking. To attempt, as Frye does, a catalogue of the freshening spirit is to mistake the table of contents for the poetry itself. (Layton 166)

"He's an intellectual pure & simple, & no great critic has ever been purely intellectual. But he's erudite & clever as hell & maybe he'll prove the exception" (Pacey 318).

In a series of reviews and review-articles, such as "a Group of Seven" in Queen's Quarterly (Autumn 1956), Pacey emerges as Layton's champion, leading Layton to congratulate him in the "horses of realism" passage referred to earlier: "With Frye and Smith, first it was the 'metaphysicals,' and now it's the 'mythologizers'. But you were the only one to put your money on the 'realists', and by gum and all the golden hills of Jesu, it's your horses that have walked off with the pennant" (408).

It was the tremendously prolific energy of Layton and Pacey, and the determined nature of their opposition to the Frygian model--Layton, in his forewords and prefaces; Pacey, in his numerous reviews and review-articles--which helped to foster the flowering of diverse styles and individual ventures--the "explosion" of the Canadian literary scene in the 1960s which suddenly gave Canadian literature the vital and viable presence on the international scene which George Woodcock celebrates in his Northern Spring (1987). Layton achieved the stature of the leading figure in this renaissance, and Pacey, his anti-formalist champion, played
a significant role as well, as Frank Davey notes in *From There to Here: A Guide to English-Canadian Literature Since 1960*: "The emergence of Canadian poetry in the sixties and seventies (including that of Avison, Reaney, Mandel and Watson) out of Frye's confining shadow into an unprecedented variety of idiosyncratic forms owes at least a small debt to Desmond Pacey."13

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**Textual Introduction**

The aim of this dissertation is to produce a scholarly edition which is readable for scholars and the general public. In making this decision, I have been encouraged by the editorial philosophy of W.E. Fredeman. As he remarks in his "Textual Introduction and Description of the Textual Practices and Apparatus" to his planned ten-volume Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti:

In short, there is no philosophy of editing letters, no standard, no ideal model for emulation. Editors by and large are on their own to discover solutions to the complexities they face in the documents they edit.

Fredeman argues that editors of letters should abjure the "editorial pedantries" of the diplomatic text--a text which maintains all accidentals in the original:
These pedantries—conventions designed to signal lacunae, interpolations, excisions, insertions, palimpsests, calligraphic slips, false starts, uncertain or alternative readings, interlineations, restorations, and other textual information—are conveyed by various sigla—angled and square brackets, braces, carets, underlining, bold-faced rules, super and subscripts, cancellations, and other printing devices—designed either to approximate a typographic facsimile of the manuscript or to indicate visually the editor’s editorial sophistication...these conventions are at best distracting, at worst obfuscating.

Fredeman goes on to note two central failures of such conventions—the first is the tendency to produce texts that are difficult to read which would be better replaced by photofacsimiles (which involves as corollary a philosophical quandary: as Fredeman said to me "If you’re trying to produce exact replicas, why bother editing them in the first place? Just publish the photostats!"14). The second and equally significant problem is the fact that such conventions shut out the non-specialist educated public. If, however, a writer’s letters are seen as non-canonical, the editor assumes much greater flexibility in the standardization and regularization of punctuation, spelling, capitalization, abbreviation and matters of format—placement of addresses, closings, postscripts and marginalia. Inevitably, any philosophy is dross until tested in the furnace of experience. Here then are specific editorial decisions regarding the Layton-Pacey correspondence.
Textual Practices:

1. Defining the Canon. The correspondence is an integral text; it deserves to be edited in its entirety. There are only a handful of letters which communicate insignificant information ("It now looks as if I shall have to defer my Toronto visit..." Pacey 646). To pick and choose among the remaining for scholars and students of Canadian literature would be presumptuous.

This decision leaves two lesser considerations as to the scope of the project. The first concerns a group of "borderline" texts: several letters between Irving Layton and Mary Pacey and between Aviva Layton and Desmond Pacey, letters written on Layton's behalf in application for grants, a letter to Michael Pacey, a telephone message, a letter to Layton from Peter Pacey (I have included the majority of this group). The second concerns a letter included in the Pacey letters to Layton at Concordia University signed "Des" which I have concluded, on the basis of both handwriting and content, was not written by Desmond Pacey.

2. Order, Numbering, Dating. The obvious choice of chronological order leaves the question of whether to use a simple consecutive numbering system or, as is used in some editions of reciprocal correspondence, a question and response, A and B format. The latter system is unusable
here because the two men (especially Layton) frequently write series of letters to the other as part of an ongoing communication not restricted to a question/response nature.

Two initial challenges faced in editing the text are its size (seven hundred and twenty-seven letters) and the difficult calligraphy of Layton and Pacey; an equally daunting--and more enduring--difficulty is that one hundred and fifty-three of the letters are undated or partially dated (Layton often uses only the day of the week, Pacey frequently omits the year), and at least thirteen letters are misdated (the common error is year, but also month and date). The majority of the undated letters are Layton's two-sided post cards (replaced by one-sided "picture postcards" in the sixties as Layton becomes world-traveller). With the aid of a magnifying glass and light table, I have gradually determined the dates for almost all of these cards from their postmark (a few cards were not stamped), or, more frequently, a much faded postmark in conjunction with internal evidence, Layton's day-of-the-week dating, and a perpetual calendar. There remain a handful of undated letters in the text; they have been inserted at their approximate position based on internal evidence while various avenues are pursued to date exactly these letters.

3. Headnotes. Headnotes contain all textual information about the letter: its number, its nature (pc after the number indicates it is a postcard, ppc that it is a picture
postcard, cc that it is a Christmas card), its mode (ts after the number indicates the few typewritten letters), its date (which has been regularized to aid the reader) and source for dating (hypothetical dates indicated by square brackets, pm indicates this hypothetical date has been determined from the postmark), and finally, "[marginalia]" indicates marginalia has been inserted at its appropriate position in the text of the letter.

There are other types of physical information about the individual letters which are not included in the headnotes: size of paper (Pacey's near-uniform use of standard 8 1/2 x 11 inch writing paper versus Layton's variable stationery and habit of writing notes on the backs and margins of enclosures is significant and merits mention here in the "Introduction" but the repetition of such information distracts the reader), Pacey's uniform use of University of New Brunswick letterhead, and the many aerogrammes the two men exchanged the year Pacey lived in England.

4. Format: Dates. Dates are regularized with names and days of months expanded and ordered thus: June 22, 1957; days of the week appear only when they have been employed to determine the date of the letter. Hypothesized dates are indicated by square brackets, whether editorial or taken from a postmark.
5. **Heading, salutations and complimentary closes.**

Headings, salutations and complimentary closes are maintained as they appear but have been standardized to the extent of their placement on the page and, for consistency, commas follow complimentary salutations and closes regardless of the writer’s usage in a given letter.

6. **Addresses.** Addresses are indicated only when they are provided in the letter.

7. **Postscripts.** Regardless of their position on the manuscript, postscripts follow the close, and are preceded by the abbreviation PS, whether these initials precede the postscript or not. Marginal notes that clearly belong within the body but for which no caret has been supplied are inserted at the appropriate place within square brackets and are indicated in the headnote (by a [marginalia] after the number). Other marginal notes are treated as postscripts.

8. **Accidentals.** Transcriptions are in the main literal, but in the interest of consistency some standardization has been imposed, although the Pacey/Layton British/American variant spellings have been maintained on the grounds of authorial distinctiveness. The accidentals of the Layton/Pacey letters are just that—accidental; while they normally are impeccable spellers, the rare error occurs (which has been
silently corrected). Layton's capitalization and punctuation of titles is wildly erratic (these also have been silently corrected to avoid confusion for the reader). Omitted words have been inserted within square brackets. Crossed-out words and carets have not been maintained.

9. Abbreviations. There is an abundance of abbreviations and ampersands within the text—so much so that this abundance may be said to characterize the text: these abbreviations are part of its style, its flavour—as the two men took time from their myriad duties, tasks and projects to scribble out these missives from Montreal to Fredericton and Fredericton to Montreal. On these grounds I have decided to maintain these abbreviations. Some editors would silently expand all ampersands and abbreviations, but such interpolation would alter the essence of this text; when Layton sweats and worries over the birth of his beloved "Tibby," how awkward and inappropriate it would be to have him constantly refer to the full, and infinitely more formal title, The Improved Binoculars. A guide to all abbreviations used (they are a small group used repeatedly) appears at the end of this introduction.

10. Illegible Words. Both writers produce a moderately difficult script; most people would find Pacey's handwriting the more troubling, but because I am his son I am able to transcribe his letters "at a glance." Layton's handwriting presents this edition with a greater challenge, but a
challenge that was overcome as time passed. The literally hundreds of words I at first found to be illegible were reduced to thirty-eight; photostats of letters containing these words were sent to Layton with the illegible word(/s) highlighted. Anna and Irving Layton have now successfully solved these remaining puzzles with only one or two being of the probable category.

11. Fugitives. The problem of fugitive letters (letters acknowledged or referred to in the text which are no longer extant with the text) has also been largely solved with time. The majority of these fugitive texts disappeared when the letter containing the acknowledgement or reference was determined to be itself misdated. A few fugitive texts were found amongst Mary Pacey’s papers. The handful of fugitives I am still searching for (in the Layton Collection at Concordia University Library and in the Pacey Papers at the National Archives in Ottawa) are noted at the appropriate place in the text.

12. Enclosures. The collection includes many clippings, poems, articles, reviews and stories which were sent (the majority by Layton) as enclosures with the letters themselves. The majority of these enclosures Pacey put in two huge "miscellaneous files" so the first task was to date and match these poems and clippings with the appropriate letter. A list of all enclosures follows each letter after
the complimentary close, and the footnotes direct the reader to the date and place of publication of this material.

The thirty-nine poems which appear as part of the body of certain letters, sometimes composed especially for Pacey's perusal, are included, as an integral part of the letter itself; poems which are merely sent with a letter are referred to by title as an enclosure, followed by publication information (first appearance in a Layton collection) only. There are other poems, however, where a simple reference to the title as an enclosure is not sufficient. Poems which Layton sent Pacey as they were about to appear in a periodical and which undergo only minor, or no changes before publication are not troubling, but a series of revisions of a poem or a poem which Layton marginally explicates (in order to defend it from Pacey's initial response) deserve to be included. This interchange about the value of specific poems and proposed changes to specific poems is integral to the correspondence and suggests that some enclosed poems, such as the heavily-annotated "The Dark and Hovering Moth" and "Because My Calling Is Such," need to be reproduced in full and appended to the appropriate letter.

The date of many of these enclosures can be determined precisely through acknowledgement ("Thanks for your two letters--the one commenting on Intervales and the other of April 22--and the two poems...I think the Moth poem is now
just about perfect. It's a strong, splendid poem. I'm not so sure about 'The Caged Bird'" Pacey 247). However, many poems can be only approximately positioned by means of nonspecific reference ("am enclosing some poems") and date of first publication. Another concern is the fact that many poems and clippings were sent under separate cover, not as enclosures at all; the evidence to determine and date such instances consists of specific references ("I received your letter of the 16th and the next day the poem for your mother arrived...") and envelopes preserved with the material enclosed. The thirty—seven envelopes preserved with the letters are relatively scant considering the size of the correspondence, but luckily Pacey kept most of these envelopes precisely because they included a postage stamp to date such material. Poems and clippings definitely sent under separate cover are noted at the appropriate point in the text preceded by "[sc]" to indicate this fact.

The eighty—one clippings Layton sent Pacey are likewise noted after the complimentary close, followed by appropriate publication information. As with the poems sent as enclosures, several of these clippings contain marginalia and these have been included in brackets after the enclosure has been noted.

13. Illustrations. There are only five illustrations in the text and they are reproduced size—for—size in approximately the position they appear in the letter.
14. **Footnotes.** Footnotes follow each letter. Cross-references are by letter and, where applicable, note number. When the reference is to a letter with a single footnote, no number is cited.

The footnotes represent the most time-consuming task in the project and, in many ways, also the most challenging. An editor wishes to help the reader by elucidating the material without creating a barrier between text and reader by overdoing the annotations. In most editions of literary letters, notes tend to be dominated by biographical identifications, many of which do little more than summarize the facts available in standard reference works. Many editors concur that figures in the public domain do not require annotation. For example, Layton frequently invokes the names of great artists—Picasso, Blake, Lorca—to support his opinions; a list of annotations appended to such lists of the greats would form an unnecessary barrier between reader and text, would insult the reader’s intelligence and would unduly interrupt the content-flow of the letters. On the other hand, in the specific field of Canadian literature, this edition identifies all Canadian literary figures the first time they are mentioned in the text, whether they are well-known figures (Frye, Pratt, Scott) or not. To read this edition is to immerse oneself in the world of Canadian writing 1954-75; the reader would miss a great deal without some basic information about the many individuals referred to.
Footnotes are also employed to give publication information on the works of Pacey and Layton referred to in the text, to document and frequently quote from the reviews and articles they discuss by Frye, Woodcock, Dudek, and others, to elucidate references to current events and to provide miscellaneous but necessary background information. Some letters require numerous annotations (letter 5 requires over sixty, for example); others none at all.

15. Typeface, Fonts, Spacing. Courier 12 is employed for the body of the text and Courier 10 for the footnotes to ensure they stand out from the letters themselves. Although dissertations are traditionally double-spaced, letters, once double-spaced, "cease to look like letters anymore," (Fredeman, in conversation) so they appear here in a single-spaced format.

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Notes on the Manuscript Letters

The originals of the Layton letters in this edition can be found in the Irving Layton Collection at Concordia University in Montreal; Joy Bennett of Concordia has recently compiled A Catalogue of the Letters, Tapes & Photographs in the Irving Layton Collection (Calgary: U of Calgary P, 1993). The originals of the Pacey correspondence
in this edition can be found with the Pacey Papers at the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa.

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Thanks are due to the following individuals who were of assistance in completing this editorial project: to the members of my dissertation committee—Ronald B. Hatch (supervisor), Richard Cavell, Ira B. Nadel and Laurence Ricou—to Irving Layton and Anna Pottier-Layton, to Mary Pacey and Margaret Pacey, to Anne Goddard and Sylvie Ladouceur of the National Archives of Canada, and Joy Bennett of Concordia University Library, to W.E. Fredeman and Louis Dudek, to Jennifer Norfolk of the CBC Radio Archives in Toronto and to Mary Kirvan of the CBC Television Library there, to Mary Flagg at the Harriet Irving Library at the University of New Brunswick, Neil Somerville of the BBC Radio Archives in London, to the reference librarians (especially Joe Jones) at the University of British Columbia Library, and finally, to my wife, copyeditor and computer coach, Susan E. Wall.

Michael Pacey
GUIDE TO ABBREVIATIONS USED

Abbreviations which appear in the text of the letters fall into three basic categories:

standard shorthand abbreviations of common words such as

& and
bk book
cd could
ms manuscript
wd would

and of proper nouns and adjectives such as

Can/Cdn Canadian
Grt Brtn Great Britain
ME Middle East
USA United States of America

abbreviated forms of the names of their friends and associates (such abbreviations are often annotated the first time they appear), such as

Fred/FC Fred Cogswell
Leonard/LC Leonard Cohen
Louis/Ls D/Loo Du/ Louis Dudek

abbreviated titles of books by the two men, some of which conform to standard abbreviation of titles (LPS The Long Pea-Shooter; BP The Blue Propellor) and some of which vary from this formula (Tibby/Binox The Improved Binoculars; Balls etc. Balls for a One-Armed Juggler; 10 CP Ten Canadian Poets).

Abbreviations employed for periodicals are also frequently non-standard:
Can Forum/CF Canadian Forum
Fid Fiddlehead
QQ Queen’s Quarterly
Tam Rev/TR Tamarack Review

Editorial abbreviations used include:
ts typescript
ms manuscript (in the original sense of handwriting)
sc separate cover
pc postcard (and ppc picture postcard)
cc Christmas card
tg telegram
Notes


Contact Press
29 Mayfield Ave,
Toronto, Ontario

Gentlemen:

I have been asked by Henry E. Vizetelly, editor of The International Year Book to write the article on Canadian Literature, 1954. Would you be good enough to send me such of your books as you consider worthy to be discussed in such a survey? My deadline is December 31, so I shall be ready to receive books up until the first week of December.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours truly,
Desmond Pacey

DP/am

1Contact Press was founded by Raymond Souster in 1952 with the publication of Cerberus, a collection of poems by Souster, and by Irving Layton and Louis Dudek, both of whom assisted him in editing the press; Pacey is addressing his letter to the three poets.

2Henry E. Vizetelly (1903-1972), career editor at Funk and Wagnall’s in New York, a nephew of Francis II. Vizetelly, one of the original editors at that firm.

June 16, 1955

Dear Irving,

As I promised, I am enclosing my two children's books\(^1\) for the delectation (or detestation) of your kids. Now there's some real poetry for you!

I have read *The Blue Propeller*\(^2\) and am delighted with it. You certainly have impaled Georgie Woodcock\(^3\). I'll bet he'll hesitate before lambasting you again. The whole book has the energy, frankness, honesty & healthy earthiness which make your work such a refreshing change in the staid literary atmosphere of Canada.

It was grand to see you at last & to spend a few delightful hours together. Fred\(^4\) & I agreed that that afternoon with you was the best part of the whole trip.\(^5\)

Please thank your wife\(^6\) for the good meal she prepared on the spur of the moment.

Be sure to look us up if you come this way. And in any case I'll probably be seeing you at the Kingston conference.\(^7\) (My invitation was here awaiting me.)

All the best,

Des Pacey

enclosure: *The Cow with the Musical Moo and Hippity Hobo and the Bee*


\(^3\)George Woodcock (b. 1912), poet, critic, a founder (in 1959) and longtime editor of *Canadian Literature*, and author of travel books, biographies, and such significant texts on Canadian writing as *Odysseus Ever Returning* (1970), *The World of Canadian Writing* (1980), and *Northern Spring* (1987).

Woodcock had written a negative review of Layton's *The Long Pea-Shooter* and *In the Midst of my Fever* ("Recent Canadian Poetry," *Queen's Quarterly*, 62.1: 111-12), which he described as "two pseudo-Whitmanesque volumes...by Irving Layton, a self-conscious literary shocker who...is negligible as a poet." Layton replied in the second edition of *The Blue Propeller* with the poems "Georgie? Am I Concrete Enough?" and "Fell Horatio" (for George Woodcock), (np).


\(^5\)Pacey and Cogswell travelled to Ottawa for the annual meeting of the Learned Societies (June 9-10), at which Pacey was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. They stopped in Montreal on their return journey to meet Layton.

\(^6\)Elizabeth (Betty/Boschka) Layton (Sutherland) (1920-1984), artist with one-man shows in Montreal and California, author of the volume of poems *The Prodigal Sun* (1982), and Layton's second wife.
The Canadian Writer's Conference, Queen's University, July 28-31, 1955 (the "Kingston Conference") had originally been proposed at a small poetry conference planned by Louis Dudek held on the Thanksgiving weekend of 1953 at the summer cottage of DG Jones (see 409.2) in Keewaydin, which later came to be known as the "Keewaydin Poetry Festival" (see 409.5). F.R. Scott, the guiding force behind the "Kingston Conference," knowing that the Rockefeller Foundation would not sponsor such a meeting if it involved poets exclusively, also invited editors, publishers, booksellers and critics. The general theme of the Canadian Writer’s Conference became "The Writer, his Media and the Public" and the aim, to encourage mutual understanding among author, publisher, critic and reader. The four days of lectures, panel and round-table discussions, and poetry readings focused on the topics "The Writer," "The Writer's Media," and "The Writer and the Public." This unique opportunity for writers from across the country to meet and debate key issues is now seen as a watershed in the development of Canadian literature. To cite just two examples: as a result of discussions during and after the Conference McClelland & Stewart issued its New Canadian Library Series of editions of Canadian literary texts, and Canadian Literature (see 244) and Prism International (see 277) appeared in Vancouver. See George Whalley ed., Writing in Canada: Proceedings of the Canadian Writer's Conference, Queen's University, 28-31 July, 1955 Toronto: Macmillan, 1956.

Dear Desmond,

Your Hippity Hobo has made a great hit with all of us: Sissyboo1 goes around saying it and also something that sounds very much like "the musical moo." I’ve read both books and am delighted with the stories as well as the unconventional slant rhymes. It’s good to know that children that young are being introduced to one of the main props of modern poetry. Incidentally, about 14 yrs ago I wrote a poem quite similar in idea to your extraordinary cow—only it was written for an adult and it was kind of a leave-taking both of her and of romanticism. In the poem I hear the cow’s moo and it seems to be in great pain so I set out with a pail and itching fingers to find her. I never do. For it wasn’t a cow at all, but the whistle of a train. Deep symbolism, eh what? I wish I could put my hands on the poem, I’d send it to you.

I enjoyed meeting and talking to you and Fred. It’s a long time since I felt so completely at home with anyone: the literary racket makes us all so damned self-centred, or is it the narcissistic who take to letters in the first place? Anyway, for what it’s worth, I found you both good listeners, the kind one can talk to from the heart. I’m very glad that we met.

Your remarks about the BP are much appreciated by me. Maybe I feel the way I do about the Woodcocks and Fryes2 because I think of myself as a soldier in the trenches or on the firing line and of themselves as civilians or as brass in cushy jobs. There’s never been any love lost between soldier and civilian. It’s this damned middle-class culture, compounded of materialism, gentility, and the fag-ends of Christianity that I’m gunning for. As a teacher of many, many years I know something of the damage that this
middle-class culture inflicts on the minds and hearts of the people. The people ask for bread but they are given a stone. The fact that the stone comes wrapped up in a Review makes it not a whit more nourishing. Since 1942 we’ve been carrying on a running battle with Canadian middle-class smugness and folly—have the Fryes of this country ever given us a word of encouragement?

Isn’t that always so? The "awkward and alive" in each generation versus the "erudite—and—dead." It’s the Spirit, god damn their eyes, the Spirit that finally counts in the great Republic of letters. And here a gamin, a hobo, a thief may be the first to be called—finally what matters is the creative will.

Un-ashamedly yours,
Irving

enclosure: ts "Letter from a Straw Man" and "Owners: Côte St. Luc"

1 Naomi (Sissyboo) Parker Layton (Seabird), b. 1 May 1950, daughter of Betty and Irving Layton.

2 Northrop Frye (1912-1991), Canada’s leading literary critic and scholar, Professor, Principal, and ultimately Chancellor of Victoria College, University of Toronto, author of Fearful Symmetry (1947), a study of Blake, Anatomy of Criticism (1957), an examination of literary genre in terms of cycles of rhetorical strategy, The Great Code (1982), a structural analysis of the Bible, and numerous other works. Annually from 1950 to ’60 he also wrote the section on Canadian poetry in English for the critical roundup "Letters in Canada" in The University of Toronto Quarterly. These chronicles formed the core of The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination (1971), a text which demonstrates why his sound judgements on individual writers and his insistence on the mythopoetic nature of the imagination influenced an entire generation of poets and critics.

3 Layton is referring to the founding in Montreal in 1942 of First Statement by John Sutherland, with the help of Audrey Aikman (later, Sutherland; see 37.5) and Robert Simpson. Layton became involved with the literary magazine beginning with the ninth issue (December, 1942) which contains three of his poems. Layton and Dudek quickly influenced First Statement’s identity as a forum for writing which was earthy, proletarian, and influenced by contemporary American models rather than the T.S. Eliot-inspired poetics of A.J.M. Smith and the Preview group (Patrick Anderson, F.R. Scott, P.K. Page, Bruce Ruddick, and Neufville Shaw).


5 “Owners: Côte St. Luc,” published as "Project," Music on a Kazoo (Toronto: Contact Press, 1956) 42.

4. June 24, 1955
Dear Irving,

Thanks very much for your letter of June 22 and your kind remarks about the kids’ books. I enjoyed the two poems, too. Are they for my private delection, or to be considered for The Fiddlehead? 
I am prompted to reply so quickly by your renewed attack on Frye—which reminds me that yesterday I was reading the new (April, 1955) issue of the U of T Quarterly, in which Frye praises your In the Midst of My Fever to the skies. So now your question "have the Fryes of this country ever given us a word of encouragement?" can be answered emphatically in the affirmative. I’ve known Frye for over twenty years, and though he has a tendency to climb on bandwagons (when I first knew him he was a Marxist critic, now he’s a symbolistic-mythological critic etc) he is basically a good guy. He says what he means and doesn’t beat around the bush, and he really loves a good poem wherever he finds it. If you meet him at Kingston, as I hope you will, you will find that he is far from being the desiccated scholar that you seem to assume him to be. For one thing, he has a terrific gift for profane & even obscene invective, & is just as impatient with middle-class hypocrisies & compromises as you are.

I know that the job of writing in this country—or any country for that matter—is a pretty frustrating one. There is such apathy, ignorance etc that one feels there must be some bloody conspiracy against one, some fat smug enemies whom one must shoot down. So you identify these enemies with (among other people) academics, the "erudite and dead" as you call them. But actually the degree of active interest & support for literature among academics is considerably higher than elsewhere, and even the ones who support the wrong kinds of literature (I’m thinking of people like Rhodenizer) are few and far between. Who then are the enemies? The trouble is, I’m afraid, that there aren’t any or many real enemies. A few stuffed shirts among newspaper reviewers and the Canadian Authors’ Assoc, perhaps—but they’re hardly worthy of one’s ammunition. The whole business reminds me of Hardy’s little poem, "Hap"—if only there were some consciously malignant force hurting one, one could better bear the pain. It’s the dull weight of apathy one must try and lift all the time—and that’s one reason why I like your poetry: it’s so damned hard to be apathetic about.

Well, I’ll bore you if I ramble on much longer. To be more practical, do you think that Little Book Shop, or the Classic, or both, might be interested in selling The Cow & Hippity? Or do they not handle children’s books?

Give my regards to Betty & the kids. I’m glad you enjoyed the half day we spent together as much as I did. Frankly, I was a little bit scared of meeting you—but the fright didn’t survive the first minute.

All the best,

Des P

1Pacey contributed to The Fiddlehead from its beginnings in 1945 as a mimeographed product of the Bliss Carman Poetry Society. From 1952, when the magazine’s range and format changed, until his death in 1975, he served on the periodical’s editorial board. This included eight years (1959-67) as The Fiddlehead’s fiction editor.
Dear Desmond,

Thanks for your altogether good and wise letter. Read today N.F.'s review of In the Midst of My Fever and your description of it is certainly accurate. After all the knocks I've given him, what he wrote was great-hearted and magnanimous. It distressed me sufficiently to make me write him to tell him that I thought so. My beef—if I still had enough wind left in me to make one—is that he's characteristically blind to the virtues ("a depressingly unreal world")\(^1\) of The Long Pea-Shooter. But he does quote from it, and admits the lines stick.

A "conspiracy"? I don't know, but what would you call it? Consider the following facts objectively. I've been writing poems and stories for about a decade and a half and during that time I've appeared more often than any of my contemporaries in American magazines and books and received reviews and notices from them which few of these same contemporaries could match, beginning with a review of my first book, Here and Now, by F. Dupee in the Nation.\(^2\) He was writing about Gustafson,\(^3\) F.R. Scott\(^4\) and Anderson\(^5\) as well as myself and for each of us, I believe, it was our first appearance in print. I think I can truthfully say that I came off best. I was published in Voices\(^6\) and Commentary,\(^7\) and was the only other Canadian poet besides Klein\(^8\) to appear in a New Directions Annual.\(^9\) Observe, I am not mentioning my recent forays into American publications such as the Black Mountain Review\(^10\) & Origin,\(^11\) but confining myself strictly to the past. Now, although reasonably good grounds existed for considering me a writer of some
seriousness and talent I have been kept out of the following anthologies:

1. Smith's Book of Canadian Poetry (original and revised)
2. Gustafson's
3. Birney's Twentieth Century Can Poetry and to be released soon---
4. Klinck & Wells (I don't know its title).

When Smith was planning to bring out the first edition of his Book of Can Poetry he asked me for some poems, said he was going to use them. He never did. Bringing out his revised edition, he put in Miriam Waddington, Louis Dudek, Reaney and LePan, the last two recent arrivals but again gave me the back of his hand though by then I had something like five volumes of verse to my credit and had appeared consistently in about a dozen mags both here and abroad. Perhaps more to the point I had also written, among others, the following poems:

1. "Newsboy" (Poetry, Chi)
2. "Jewish Main Street"
3. "Drill Shed" (Poetry, Chi)
4. "The Swimmer" (Poetry, Chi)
5. "Gothic Landscape" (Commentary)
6. "Mrs. Fornheim, Refugee"
7. "Mont Rolland"
8. "De Bullion Street"
9. "Week-End Journey"
10. "Proof Reader"
11. "To a Very Old Lady"
12. "Poet and Statue".

Now any one of these poems is as good a poem as I ever hope to write and certainly, without wishing to force invidious comparisons, as good as some of the things which he included by others. Smith's sudden espousal, therefore, of my "new-found" talent cannot but put a wry smile on my lips, remembering as I do his studied neglect of that same talent in the past. Perhaps the unpleasantest duty I ever had to perform in my life was to point this out to him by letter after his laudatory review of my books on Critically Speaking. I'm no asslicker and I do not "butter the reviewers" even after they have shown themselves to be disposed favourably. The truth is the truth, and I'm beginning to suspect that the reason I'm disliked is that I refuse to convert literature to a parlor-game, albeit an engaging one. "You weigh me down" Johnson reminded Lord Chesterfield on an occasion remarkably analogous to my own. I am unkind? I cannot help it; like Shaw I have perfect eyesight.

Furthermore, Des, if you compare the reviews which my books received in this country with the reception of these books elsewhere you will again note an astonishing discrepancy. It began with my first book and has continued right up until the present. I'm thinking of Woodcock's review in the Queen's Quarterly; also neither Smith nor
Frye are reconciled to the LPS. Well, to convince you that the pattern has not altered, both William Carlos Williams and Pound wrote to congratulate me on the Peashooter, the former even going so far as to say that he had something to learn from me. I could list a half—a—dozen other American & English poets who find the Peashooter tops—among Candns, you're the only one who's been really enthusiastic.

To continue this melancholy and, I fear, rather boring tale. Two years ago or it may have been last year, Frye had great praise for Elizabeth Brewster and even Anthony Frisch (both of which he currently dismisses with a curt nod), but could find very little to praise in so fine a volume of poems as Love The Conquerer Worm though it contained two genuine masterpieces, "Cemetery in August" and "Death of Moishe Lazarovitch", neither of which he mentioned though both contain ample evidence of the "pity and terror" he today belatedly discovers in "Westmount Doll" (not half so good a poem as either one above).

What about my short stories? The story is the same—and short. Along with poems I've written about a dozen of them. When my "Vacation in La Voiselle" first appeared in Northern Review, Knopf wrote to ask me whether I would care to submit a longer work or a book of stories for their consideration so impressed they wrote were they with its excellence. "Death In The Family" evoked the same enthusiasm and the same request for manuscripts from the Dial Publishing House in New York. In recent years a spate of anthologies of Candn short stories were published. Is either "Vacation In La Voiselle" or "Death In A Family" to be found in any of them? What about "Piety"? The "English Lesson"? "A Game of Chess"? Do you think "A Plausible Story" will ever find its way into an anthology, though it was featured in Origin? Or "Mrs. Polinov"?

Had I been one who discouraged easily, I should have given up writing a long time ago, certainly after Birney's snide & patronizing review of The Black Huntsmen which held me up to ridicule across the country (it was on Critically Speaking) and to which there was no chance of reply. That book contained some of the best things I had done until then, including "The Swimmer", "Mrs. Fornheim, Refugee", "Mont Rolland", "Auspex", "Drill Shed", "Afternoon of A Coupon Clipper", etc: you'd think, however, from his remarks that I sat composing (or is it "de-") in a brothel and didn't know my left hand from my right. Or read Marriott's snippy review of Love the Conqueror Worm in the Canadian Forum. Fortunately, I was born on the wrong side of the tracks: before I encountered critics and reviewers, I had fistfights every day of my public school life with the toughs that flourished in the slum neighbourhood, and sometimes, in fact frequently, it was bottles and jackknives. I learned to give as good as I got—and never to whimper. I also learned that if you had it in you, come hell or high water, you'd earn their respect. But you had to stay in there, and keep on pounding. It's a lesson I
never forgot, and today I'm grateful to the anonymous Italians, Poles, Hungarians, and French-Canadian delinquents who taught it to me. After a broken nose and a slit cheek, what's a Frye or a Smith?

I tell you all this not to bore you or to give you the colour and dimensions of the chip on my shoulder, but because you're a literary historian. Figuratively speaking, these matters are your bread-and-butter. The facts are, I believe, largely as I state them. You will note I've deliberately avoided the part which John Sutherland and his subsequent defection played in all this, which was not inconsiderable. But that deserves a separate treatment, and in any case I gave you some inkling of its scope and nature when you were here. Since I have no reason to believe that the response which my poems evoked in this country was due to my odious personality—most of the reviewers and critics had never met me—I could only conclude that both the matter and style of what I wrote were what gave offence. And since I never doubted either my talent or my dedication and saw myself passed over in favour of the mediocre but adaptable, I further concluded that the nub of the matter was that my view of the world and what poetry is differed strikingly from theirs. It's still the brittle and the desiccated—what I would hardly call poetry at all, but a species of verse—that are most admired by our academic critics. Only in this last review by Frye do I notice a slight shift of values, with passion and spontaneity being preferred to labour and intellect. Could be I've educated him? Though his remarks on Smith and Scott are apposite and discerning, he still over-values them, as he most certainly does Miss Page, whose last book sounds like nothing so much as a parody of her earlier one. I've yet to see him or any other Canadian critic give both Dudek and Souster their just desserts: but there's all kinds of kudos for Anderson whose phonetic English accent was apparent to the reviewer in The Nation more than a decade ago. Frye's review both of The Colours as Naked and the second book by LePan will one day give him nightmares—that is, if he continues to mature. No, Des, the kind of poetry that's valued here, though I admit changes are being made and the plaster is beginning to crack is still the "clever", the "involuted", the "commentless". For my money, Frye gives himself completely away and reveals his limitations when he speaks of The Long Pea-Shooter as a "depressingly unreal world". To a professor in a library or a comfortable armchair, or engrossed in symbolic-psychological blah, blah analysis no doubt it is; but to one who lived it it isn't. The Long Pea-Shooter is a genuine touchstone: as long as the Smiths, Fryes and "who-nots" are against it, I'll go on believing that criticism in Canada has not emancipated itself from the "genteel tradition" and that the profs, the older ones anyway, have refused to acknowledge the changing Zeitgeist. One revealing item that should speak volumes to you. Smith told me in conversation that "Marie" in the LPS and "De
Bullion Street" in The Black Huntsmen were both masterpieces of their kind—but of course [he] would never use them in his projected The Blasted Pine: too raw, you know. The Blasted Pine indeed!

Well, I won't apologize for this rather lengthy letter. If it has bored you or irritated you, in all fairness you'll have to admit you brought it on yourself. One shouldn't go around poking a hornets' nest with a stick...I'll enquire about your bks this week. The poems were for your own pleasure. I'm glad they gave you some. Bet and the kids say hello to you.

All the best,
Irv

Frye's review appears in "Letters in Canada: 1954" (253-54):

When there is a core of detachment in satire, there may be a core of reality in its caricature, but most of the world of The Long Pea-Shooter is a depressingly unreal world. If the book stood alone, one would be inclined to say that here is a remarkable mind that has somehow missed its vocation. And yet, there is a personal test which every critic applies to poetry, the test of involuntary memorizing. If one remembers a poem, or part of a poem, without making a conscious effort to do so, one is probably dealing with a genuine poet. And the little pieces of phraseology that keep sticking in one's mind are surprisingly frequent...

In any case, the question of whether Mr. Layton is a real poet or not is settled by In the Midst of My Fever. One finds something of value on nearly every page of this book...And whatever lapses in expression one may find are of little importance when one is so constantly in touch with a poetic mind of genuine dignity and power.


Patrick Anderson and Irving Layton are probably the most interesting poets of this group....Anderson's cultivated ease is entirely absent from Irving Layton's Here and Now. Layton writes out of a stark experience...experiences he translates into descriptive satires akin to those of Karl Shapiro but not at all dependent on them...As in this passage, the anger is always leaping right out of Layton's poems and at your throat, often busting up the poems in the process. Yet for all their snarling, bottom-dog attitudes they often succeed in convincing us of their reality.


F(rancis) R(eginald) Scott (1899-1985), poet, constitutional lawyer and political activist, a founder (with A.J.M. Smith) of the McGill Fortnightly Review, and Preview, and translator of Quebecois poetry; author of Overture (1945), Signature (1964) and The Dance is One (1973).

Patrick Anderson (1915-1979), English expatriate poet and journalist, (A Tent for April 1945, The Colour as Naked 1953, Return to Canada: Selected Poems, 1977), and a founder and the guiding force behind Preview (see 3.3).


12. A(rthur) J(ames) M(arshall) Smith (1902–80), poet (*News of the Phoenix 1943, A Sort of Ecstasy 1954*), a founder (with Scott) of the McGill Fortnightly Review, the first concerted effort to establish modernism in Canadian poetry, and an influential editor, critic and anthologist (*The Book of Canadian Poetry* 1943, 48, 57, and the *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (1960). Although his output as a poet was small, and although he spent half a century as a professor in the United States (at Michigan State University), Smith's impact on modern Canadian literature was enormous.


Carl F. Klinck (1908-91), literary historian, general editor of *The Literary History of Canada* (1965, 1976), Professor of English at the University of Western Ontario, the author of studies of Pratt (1947) and Robert Service (1976).


Douglas LePan (b. 1914), diplomat, economist, poet (*The Wounded Prince and Other Poems* 1948, *The Net and The Sword* 1953), novelist (*The Deserter*, 1964), Professor of English at Queen’s (1959-64) and at the University of Toronto (1964-80).

*Here and Now* (Montreal: First Statement, 1945).
  *Now is the Place* (Montreal: First Statement, 1948).
  *Cerberus* (Toronto: Contact, 1952).
  *Love the Conquerer Worm* (Toronto: Contact, 1953).

"Newsboy," *Here and Now* np.

"Jewish Main Street," *Here and Now* np.

"Drill Shed," *Here and Now* np.

"The Swimmer," *Here and Now* np.


"Mont Rolland," *The Black Huntsmen* 41.

"De Bullion Street," *Here and Now* np.

"Week End Journey," published as "Excursion to Ottawa," *Now Is the Place* (44), and as "Weekend Special," *The Black Huntsmen* 27.
"Proof Reader" Here and Now np.

"To a Very Old Lady," published as "To a Very Old Woman" Cerberus 70-71.


"Is not a patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached ground encumbers him with help?"


Layton refers to Williams congratulatory remarks:

You have opened up the whole northern sky for us!...You have let in the air among the objects and people of our lives which was very necessary at the present time...I will never be able to look north without thinking of you from this time forth...Your abandon, without restraint, to printed page amounts to genius!


Desmond Pacey had not yet written about Layton aside from a brief mention in Creative Writing in Canada (1952); Layton refers here to Pacey's enthusiasm expressed in person and in the correspondence.

Layton is "telescoping" Frye's "Letters in Canada: 1951, Poetry," which praised Elizabeth Brewster's East Coast and Anthony Frisch's Third Poems, with his "Letters in Canada: 1953" (U of T Quarterly 23.3 April, 1954: 253-63) which stated:

Love the Conqueror Worm, by Irving Layton consists very largely of what one has come to recognize as Laytonese--forced language and flaccid rhythm--but at the beginning of the book there are a few poems with some freshness and originality.

Frye's "Letters in Canada: 1954," which praises In the Midst of My Fever ("At last it is possible to see what kind of poet Mr. Layton is, and he proves to be not a satirist at all, but an erudite elegiac poet, whose technique turns on an aligning of the romantic and the ironic: [quotes lines 10-13 of "Westmount Doll"] 253) also discusses Elizabeth Brewster's Lillooet and Anthony Frisch's Poems and The Book of Sketches in a summary and ambivalent manner.

Elizabeth Brewster (b. 1922), New Brunswick-born poet (East Coast 1951, Passage of Summer 1969), novelist (The Sisters 1974, Junction 1983), and short story writer (It's Easy to Fall on the Ice 1977, Visitations 1987); a founder of the Fiddlehead.
Anthony Frisch (b. 1921), poet and high-school teacher in Pickering, Ontario; author of *Though I Speak* (1949), *The House* (1950), and *Poems* (1954).


This letter is not included among the correspondence in the Layton Collection at Concordia University.


This letter is not included in the correspondence in the Layton Collection at Concordia University.


Anne Marriott (b. 1913), poet (*The Wind Our Enemy* 1939, *Calling Adventurers* 1941), and a founder of *Contemporary Verse*.


John Sutherland (1919-1956), editor and critic, founder and editor of *First Statement* 1942-45 and *First Statement Press*, editor of *Northern Review* (1945-56, the result of the merging of *First Statement* with *Preview*), and *Other Canadians: An Anthology of the New Poetry in Canada 1940-1946* (1947).

As editor of *First Statement* and its successor, *Northern Review*, Sutherland championed the social-realist poetry of Layton, Dudek and Souster; however in his 1951 article, "The Past Decade in Canadian Poetry," (Northern Review 4.2 Jan.-Feb. 1951: 42-47) Sutherland concludes that this literary movement was a failure: "The New Poets have come back, if not always to religion, at least to a soul-searching which has strong religious implication" (45). Sutherland rejected the rebellious spirit he had earlier embraced in favor of a reverence for tradition (this shift coincided with his own conversion to Catholicism):

...it seems obvious to me that the recent work of the younger poets is inferior to their work in the early forties, but that, nevertheless...the principles behind this recent work are potentially better principles for poetry. It is generally better for the poet to accept than oppose the values inherent in this society (47).

Sutherland's repudiation of Modernism continued with "The Great Equestrians" (Northern Review 6.4 Oct.-Nov. 1953:21-28), which praises the work of G.K. Chesterton, Roy Campbell and C.S. Lewis over that of Pound, Eliot and Joyce. The content of the periodical reflected this shift in values; poetry and articles with a Christian theme were predominant—Layton's name last appears on the masthead as an editorial member in 2.2 (July-Aug. 1948) and his last work appears in the following issue 2.3 (Sept.-Oct.1948).
P.K. Page (b. 1916), poet (As Ten, As Twenty 1946, Cry Ararat! Poems New and Selected 1967), fiction writer (The Sun and the Moon and Other Fictions 1973), and a founder of Preview. Page is the author of the autobiographical Brazilian Journal (1987) and is also (as P.K. Irwin) a painter of note.

P.K. Page, As Ten, As Twenty (Toronto: Ryerson, 1946) and The Metal and the Flower (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1954), the latter of which is praised in Frye's "Letters in Canada: 1954," as are F.R. Scott's Events and Signals and A.J.M. Smith's A Sort of Ecstasy.

Raymond Souster (b. 1921), poet (When We Are Young, 1946; The Colour of the Times 1964), and editor (New Wave Canada 1966); founder of Contact (1952-54), Combustion (1957-66), and Contact Press.

Anderson produces a wandering, gracefully awkward verse as if to amuse himself on a rainy day; and we do not need to look at the jacket biography to guess that he was at Oxford in the 30's." (Dupee)


June 28, 1955
Dear Desmond,

Instead of rejoicing that Smith & Frye have shown me friendship and courtesy, I am resentful! How stupid can a person get? As I meant to write Frye, I most admire magnanimity & wisdom, since I sadly lack both. But then I’m a poor blabbermouth of a poet. Please excuse.

Yours,
Irv

July 5, 1955
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter and postcard. I was very glad to get your side of the story. You do indeed make out a good case for your belief that there is some kind of conspiracy against you. Anyway, it seems to me that things are looking up now, & I wouldn’t worry about it. Part of it may be sheer ignorance. I certainly didn’t know in 1947, when I edited my Book of Canadian Stories, that you wrote short stories—or I’d probably have put one in. And one does make some astonishing lapses—I, for example, completely forgot George Whalley when I was writing Creative Writing, & didn’t even mention his name!

Smith’s a funny anthologist. He seems to have whims—and put someone in & leave someone out quite on the spur of the moment.
The main thing is to keep writing & in the long run people will stop & listen.

I’m now in the thick of a tremendous Summer School programme—courses on Milton, the second generation of Romantics, Creative Writing, & Twentieth C Poetry—so I’ll keep this brief.

All the best,

Des

1A Book of Canadian Stories (Toronto: Ryerson, 1947).

2George Whalley (1915—1983), scholar, critic (Studies in Literature and the Humanities (1985), essayist and poet (No Man an Island, 1948), Professor of English at Queen’s University.

3Creative Writing in Canada: A Short History of English-Canadian Literature (Toronto: Ryerson, 1952).

8. July 18, 1955

Dear Desmond,

I don’t know why on earth I was so snappish about Frye’s review, unless by now it’s simply reflex action. His remarks on Smith and Scott were certainly temperate, nothing one cd really quarrel with, though I still don’t go along with him on Page. However—

What I don’t want to leave in yr mind is the impression that I think myself the victim of a "conspiracy". Fuck that note, brother. My long and somewhat irritable letter probably sounded to you as if I did. If some vinegar got into the lines, please blame it on the unusually hot & dry summer we are having. Everyone’s temper is spoiling these days. Personally, I very much dislike martyrs; anyhow those who think themselves possessed of talents for that role. A good fight is something else; win, lose, or draw.

It wasn’t myself and the "raw deal" I got that I was really moaning about, but the kind of writing I’m supposed to stand for: call it "earthy", or what you will. I wd simply say of it, it is un-genteel and un-academic, and tries to be genuine about the world, not putting down emotions that are not felt. I am by no means the first, nor shall I be the last to write like this. At present there are in Canada writers every bit as opposed to gentility and a sterile academicism as I am: Dudek, Cogswell, Souster, Mandel, Cohen, Turnbull, etc, to name the first that come to mind. The only point I care to make is this: the other kind of poetry has up to now received all the kudos, the Anderson-Page Anglicized pyrotechnical displays, or the correct dullness of Birney, Livesay, etc. The reputation of Birney is entirely out of line with his performance: how it ever got to be that way is something for a literary detective to unearth. Then there’s the school of Smith & Scott, lumped together here for convenience...Now take a good look at the work of Dudek; here’s no mere poetaster or Sunday poet. W.C. Williams has just written the most
laudatory letter⁵ about his Europe.⁶ Or Souster, no one-volume tyke, either; and with enough passion to fry half-a-dozen of his contemporaries. Canada does not deserve its poets. Has one single article on these poets ever appeared?

I hope this doesn’t sound peevish, or that I’m blowing my trumpet or any of the other manifestations of a wounded "amour propre". When I say, fuck that note, I mean it. What I am interested in is the truth, and if my view of the "literary situation" in this country is wrong or jaundiced, do correct me. Either these things are important, and engage men’s passions justly, or they are not, and people like myself who think they are and sometimes shout, grow angry, snarl and spit are crazy and had better be locked up in a bughouse.

Yours,
Irving

PS About the bookstores what is it you want me to do? I have no doubt they’ll take copies of yr books if yr publisher sends them some samples & an accompanying letter. I was not able to tell them what discount your firm allowed. But send samples to Morgans & Eatons, Classic Bookstore, Everyman’s ", Burton’s. Poems are for your enjoyment(?).

enclosure: ts "Halos at Lac Marie Louise"⁷ (ms: "From The Bull Calf and Other Poems), "Holiday"⁸ (ms: From the bloodshot ¹) and "One View of Dead Fish"⁹ (ms: From the bloodshot ¹).


⁵William Carlos Williams, letter to Louis Dudek, 29 June 1955, Dudek Papers, National Archives of Canada.

⁶Louis Dudek, Europe (Toronto: Contact, 1955).

⁷"Halos at Lac Marie Louise," The Bull Calf and Other Poems 18.

Dear Desmond,

Get your hands on GS Fraser's *The Modern Writer and His World*, published by the Criterion Press. That was the subject I was trying all along to get discussed. Smith's talk about the poet living all to himself, etc got the whole conference off to a wrong start. We found ourselves talking about incomes, etc instead of the real issues of the time.

I feel also we displayed a lack of faith both in ourselves and in the Can public by not letting them know our conclusions. Moral cowardice? Inhibitions? Regards to Fred.

Layton

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1 Misdated July 2, 1955.


3 Layton refers to Smith's opening address:

   Well, there is the picture. The poet as exile, as the rejected man, as nobody. How do we explain it?...The real reason for the unpopularity of the poet lies elsewhere. Not in the fact—which is not a fact at all—that the poet has isolated himself from either the world of men or the world of nature...(15-16)


4 The "Kingston Conference"; see #2:7.

5 The Conference's closing session passed resolutions to promote Canadian writing in schools, universities, libraries, and through government subsidies to writers but, despite Layton's vocal opposition, decided against a motion to acquaint the public with these resolutions.

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Dear Irving,

I have to thank you for your letter of July 18 and your postcard of August 2.

Re the children's books & Classic--I have asked my publishers to send the sample copies & a letter. You might ask sometime if anything has come in.

I don't know that there is much point pursuing our debate about Frye, Smith etc any further. I'm temperamentally optimistic & I believe that in the long run good work in any form will be recognized. One has to be tough enough to take the slurs, snubs and oversights in one's stride--& you have that toughness.

As for earthy vs metaphysical poetry--the best poetry will be both. True there's been a Canadian fashion for
"earthless" metaphysics à la Smith, Page (at times), LePan—but it will pass.

I'll try & get hold of the Fraser book.

I agree with you we rather missed the boat at the conference. We should really have come to grips with the true function of the writer today. That would have meant so much more to us than all this rather futile argument about the mass media. I rather wish they'd left the mass media problem out entirely, as it has little to do with the real problem of writing today. The conference became too much like a sales conference of junior executive & advertising men.¹

But I shouldn't gripe. I enjoyed meeting people, & listening to the poetry, & drinking the liquor. At least most of the time we weren't stuffy—I loved the way, for example, Dudek sprang the bloody lid at that reading by mentioning "jocks" six(?) times in the very first poem!² That must be unique in meetings of Canadian writers!

Love to Betty & the kids.

Des

PS I still have a strong & favourable impression of "Bull Calf".³

Des

¹The Conference had taken as its theme "The Writer and his Media" for reasons of financial support (see 2.7), inviting not just writers and critics, but also journalists, publishers, broadcasters and librarians as well.


The poetry readings at Kingston—what James Reaney calls "the little conference within the greater one"—were Mr. Layton's idea. He suggested during the first morning's general session that anyone who had new poetry with him and would like to read it, or who would be interested in hearing others read, should come along in the early afternoon to a lounge in one of the University buildings...the poems read were all recent, and for the most part unpublished. They ranged in tone from Mr. Dudek's parodies on contemporaries... (136) Jay Macpherson, "Report on the Poetry Readings," Writing in Canada 136-39.

³Layton read a number of poems to Pacey when they were together at the conference (see 18), including "The Bull Calf," Bull Calf 9-10.
mixers, the plunging sounds of stones and boulders. A quiet place we picked ourselves!

In the past ten days we’ve been here we’ve slowly straightened out our reflexes. The sounds we hear are all pleasant ones: voices across flowing water, the loon’s call, etc. Sissyboo has learned to swim very well and she can also row now. Betty is looking magnificently beautiful, and I’ve written five moderately successful poems. Max and I have started reading the Bible together--there’s poetry for you--and intend to go right through it. After that we’ll go through the Odyssey and the Iliad. Max is an appreciative listener, it’s a pleasure to read to him. He takes everything in and the comments he makes are amusing and intelligent. He’s a very great joy to me.

Have you gotten hold of Fraser’s book? I finished it before coming out here and for my money it’s the most sensitive account of modern literature; simply miles ahead of chaps like Daiches. He almost persuades me you have something when you speak of ‘creative criticism’. I see I must go into the matter more deeply. I suppose it is possible for a perceptive critic to see an arrangement between originals that is itself original, though the question for me would always be whether thereby he ‘creates’ something new, something that wasn’t there before. Can ‘arrangement’ ‘order’ be equated with spontaneity and vision? Isn’t the good critic doing his appointed work when he seeks out and shows us the implications of the original creative impulse, implications perhaps not surmised by the artist himself: the sort of thing Wilson Knight has done so suggestively with Shakespeare? He’s the pick-and-shovel man, if you will, after the bulldozer has gone through. Or again, the critic can create an atmosphere, a climate of opinion, which will secure for some original writer a patient and reflective hearing. I fear that unless the word ‘creative’ is kept only for that which is spontaneous, original, and dynamically new, the Lister Sinclairs will cop the word, as he did at [the] Conference, for the kind of stuff he turns out. You heard Weaver himself tell us that the creative and the other stuff (Sinclair’s) were two sides of the same coin.

Well, I’ve had a good summer of writing. I’ve readied another manuscript of fifty poems, an improved and superior version of The Long Pea-Shooter and The Blue Propellor. I’m calling it the bloodshot and hope to bring it out sometime early next spring, finances permitting. At the same time I have almost finished another manuscript of thirty-five poems in a more serious vein, after the manner of In the Midst of My Fever and The Cold Green Element. I am going to call this book The Bull Calf And Other Poems. I don’t think I can bring this out before the year following. No money...The family wishes to be remembered.

As ever,

Irving


3. Lister Sinclair (b. 1921), radio and television dramatist, producer, actor and program host; most prolific during the golden age of Canadian radio in the 1940s and 1950s.

4. Robert Weaver (b. 1921), producer and editor for the Talks and Public Affairs Department of the CBC, where he initiated Critically Speaking (1949) and Anthology (1953); a founder and editor of Tamarack Review.

5. Layton refers to the following Weaver statement:
   But there are also the so-called radio—writers like Lister Sinclair, Tommy Tweed, Len Peterson, and a number of others, whose talents and creative work are not inferior to work being accomplished in other media in Canada....In most cases, the writer's responsibility to his work and to his public seems to me to be two sides of the same coin (114).
   Robert Weaver, "Broadcasting," Writing in Canada 103-14.


12. September 7, 1955

Dear Irving,

Just back from a three week junket to Kingston & Ottawa—a busman's holiday during which I did research in the Queen's & Parlt'y libraries—so have a terrific pile of letters to answer. Yours of Aug 22 is among them.

Our argument re "creative criticism" is still alive & fertile. Of course everything hinges on what we mean by the word "creation", which involves us in cosmogonies. As you know, there are those who maintain that God created something out of nothing; others who regard the act of creation as bringing order out of primeval chaos. Now of course the latter view involves you in the logical difficulty that someone or something had to create chaos—

but that is not relevant to our argument since certainly the artist doesn’t create chaos. For our purposes surely we can accept the second view; hence the critic who, say, brings order out of the chaotic developments of English poetry in any given period is creative. I think his creation is of the same kind as that of the poet, though it may not be of the same degree—on the other hand, good criticism may be more creative than bad poetry.

To put it differently, it all hangs on the question whether the poet really creates something out of nothing. He takes—does he not—the stuff of experience & (not reduces but) lifts it to order, to meaning, to clarity, to poignancy, to passion. The critic takes the stuff of his experience—individual works of art—& lifts it to order, to meaning, to clarity, etc. I would concede that generally the degree of order achieved is not as significant as that
of the poet because his (the critic's) activity is concerned with secondary rather than primary experience.

Having said all this, I'll confess that I personally regard the poet & novelist (of the highest rank) as of far greater moment than even the best critic. I personally hope to be remembered for my stories1 & novels (only one as yet written & it unpublished!) rather than for my criticism.

Another most interesting avenue of discussion would be your statement at the conference that the poet does not look to the critic for help, but to himself & other poets. Related to this, is the belief that the best critics are themselves creative artists in their own right--e.g. Sidney, Dryden, Johnson, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Arnold, Eliot. I would grant this up to a point--the critic must know something at first hand of the task of the artist--but only up to a point. The best poets are not necessarily the best critics--witness the fact that all the critics in the above list were second-raters as artists (with Dryden & Eliot as possible exceptions). On the other hand, there have been & are critics almost as good as those who have not been or are not creative artists at all--e.g. Taine,2 I.A. Richards,3 F.R. Leavis.4 As for saying that the critic is of no use to the artist, that is sheer nonsense. No artist is so omniscient that he either never makes mistakes or is always conscious of them. After all, art at its best is a dynamic relationship between artist & audience--& the most sensitive, trained, receptive fraction of the audience is the critic. If he says "here you fail in clarity, or in power, or in passion" the artist had better listen & search his soul. Arrogance is often a vice of critics, and of CBC playwrights(!)5 but it is also a vice of some poets.

Glad to hear of all your poetic activity. I've always liked your titles before, but I don't like the bloodshot i--it's too smart-alecky for my taste. But I shall be looking forward to The Bull Calf.

I like the three poems you sent. My review of your two most recent books will be in the November Fiddlehead.6 It is favourable, but has a few cautionary words--don't take them amiss.

Regards to Betty & the kids,
Des

PS I gathered at Queen's that you made a very good impression at the conference.7 Everyone liked your earthy honesty. DP

1Pacey had published a dozen stories in periodicals at this time: "Homecoming," Acta Victoriana, LXI (Jan. 1937): 4-5.
Dear Desmond,

It may seem like arrogance, but is the merest commonsense. Art is ecstasy, there’s the beginning and the end of it; it’s a crazy dance on a heap of burning coals and it’s not reason but intuition in Bergson’s use of the term that keeps him from toppling into the flames or scorching his heels too badly, keeps him aware of the flow. It therefore follows that only another artist can understand his fellow-drunk, can trip up his heels with him, feel his intoxication & delight. I’ve yet to learn of an artist that admitted a debt to a critic, witness Silone’s acid remarks in a recent number of Time magazine. Yeats’ & Pound’s have been no more complimentary.

If the artist is serious he learns from a) his own mistakes; b) from other artists. There’s no more to be said on that subject than that: see Picasso’s introduction to the volume of paintings put out by the Museum of Modern Art. Vision, enchantment, ecstasy is the core of all creativity: only in an age of bumbling mediocrity & christianized slum proletarianism is that ever forgotten & ignored; Jarrell’s essay “The Age of Criticism” says many wise and pertinent things on the subject. I won’t bore you by recapitulating them. The best critics of the art of poetry have been poets themselves—they alone can walk on the thin razor edge of reason & intuition. That is not to be taken that people like Leavis cannot be read with profit & enjoyment: but can YOU imagine a Lawrence or an Eliot or a Pound taking much

13.[ts] Sunday [September 11, 1955]

Pacey had also completed one unpublished novel, The Land Is Bright (1949).

2Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), French critic and historian who devised a "scientific" method of criticism based on the study of an author’s environment and historical context, thus influencing the growth of Naturalism; author of History of English Literature (1864).

3I.A. Richards (1893-1979), British literary critic, father of New Criticism (Practical Criticism 1929), semanticist (he collaborated on The Meaning of Meaning 1923), expert on the theory of education, and in later years, a poet (see 146).


5A reference to Lister Sinclair, see 11.3.


7The Kingston Conference; see 2.7.
notice of what he had to say about their craft or changing their styles to meet his strictures? Comparison & analysis, the main tools of criticism, allow you to walk around the periphery of the fire, never to dance on it, flinging your heels skyward.

I seem to remember Eliot once saying that the ONLY critics worth paying attention to were the critics who practised and practised well the art of which they wrote. If he didn’t change his mind on that he was, speaking strictly from the standpoint of the creator, on very safe and assumable ground. For the rest, the mobs and the snobs, I concede the critic’s function—and a very useful one it is too. If he knows his business and he’s up & about doing it he clears the ground of a lot of debris thereby making a path to the original creator mightily labouring in his region. What’s wanted in him are insight & courage, the knack of recognizing genuine talent not, for godsake lecturing to it with all due solemnity. If he does the latter the chances are that he’ll miss the mark completely and make an ass of himself—as witness Leavis currently on Pound & Auden. The more reasons they adduce for their strictures the more foolish they appear in the eyes of those who know, the confraternity of the creative. Still, you will say one must strike a balance, make some kind of evaluation. Agreed. But that’s a different thing, vastly so, from the critic telling the creator where to go and what he must do to succeed. In fact, it’s axiomatic that the greater the artist the less likelihood is there that he’ll [pay] any attention to what the critics will tell him. The great ones have a sure instinct, a kind of self-regulating device which tells them infallibly along what paths they are to strike out. CAN YOU IMAGINE any really towering figure putting much stock in what the Untermeyers, Leavises, Wilsons & Tates have to say about their craft? In fact, can you point to any figure in music, painting, sculpture, or poetry—again, I’m talking of the ‘greats’—bothering their heads overmuch about what some of the assessors and evaluators have decided. I don’t think you can. Did Rodin think he cd learn from the critics, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Pound, Yeats?

So you see if you think I speak nonsense when I say the creator has nothing to learn from the critic, you must also concede that I find myself in unusually brilliant company.

All the best,
Irving

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1Henri Bergson (1859-1941), French philosopher, author of Creative Evolution (1907), differentiated two modes of knowing: analysis and intuition. By intuition Bergson meant "the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressable." Creative Evolution trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Modern Library, 1944) 194.

2Ignazio Silone (pseud. Secondo Tranquilli) 1900-1978, Italian communist politician and writer. (Silone is not mentioned in a 1955 Time.)
Yeats' and Pound's comments on critics are numerous, to cite single examples: Yeats' portrait of "The Scholars" "All shuffle there; all cough in ink;....All think what other people think" and Pound's directive "Pay no attention to the criticisms of men who have never themselves written a notable work."


Layton is probably thinking of Eliot's assertion:
This gives us an intimation why the artist is--each within his own limitations--oftenest to be depended upon as a critic; his criticism will be criticism, and not the satisfaction of a suppressed creative wish--which, in most other persons is apt to interfere fatally.(?)


Louis Untermeyer (1885-1977), editor, poet and critic, remembered as a popular anthologist for students and the general public, editor of Modern American Verse (1919) and The Book of Wit and Humour (1955).

Edmund Wilson (1895—1972), American critic and literary historian, author of Axel’s Castle (1931) and The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature (1941), as well as plays, poems, and travel essays.

Allen Tate (1899-1979), American critic, poet, editor; a central figure in New Criticism, a member of the Fugitives who spurred the Southern renaissance, author of Reason in Madness: Critical Essays (1941), and the novel The Fathers (1938).

Dear Desmond,

I hope you weren’t put out by my ‘christianized slum proletarianism’. I sometimes try out a phrase for size; if it fits I wear it. If it doesn’t I throw it away. There’s no other way for a poet to learn, except by putting the words down on paper. Critics are no help here, the angels he wrestles are fermenting gases. Apart from the smell, the shapes these gases assume are sometimes grotesque and awesome.

R.P. Blackmur was here, lecturing on "The Literary Explosion Of The Twenties." He’s the kind of bloke that gives you critics and professors a bad name. The explosion turned out to be a dud. The wits who heard him have begun to write his name R.I.P. Black Manure. Cruel, but had you
heard the prissy, bloodless, gutless talk, you would have had your temper spoiled too.

I hope I have your permission to dedicate the poem, "The Bull Calf" to you. You liked the poem so much. Smith has included that poem in the OBCV.3

Music On A Kazoo is the title which I’ve chosen for the collection of poems after The Bull Calf And Other Poems. The manuscript is completed, but I might make changes before the final date of publication. I hope you enjoy the enclosed poem which is taken from that collection.

All the very best,

Irving

collection: ts "For Phyllis Who Snatched Her Criticized Poem in Anger"4

1R.P. Blackmur (1904-65), American critic associated with the essays in "close reading" of the New Critics, author of The Double-Agent: Essays in Craft and Elucidation (1935) and The Expense of Greatness (1940).


November 3, 1955

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of October 30.

I wasn’t exactly "put out" by your previous letter, but I did feel that you ignored completely the rather careful reasoning of my last letter and simply tried to smother me in a load of...rhetoric! (That’s being polite!) The whole assumption that poets are a superior breed who can do no wrong simply won’t bear examining. My impression is that the greatest artists have been most humble, and most ready to listen to criticism.

I see that Klinck and Watters have left you out of their new anthology,1 and therefore I am all the more delighted to learn that Smith is putting you in the Oxford Book. And of course I am delighted & flattered by your notion of dedicating the "Bull Calf" to me.

I like Music on a Kazoo much better as a title for your light verse than The Bloodshot I. The Phyllis poem is a honey.

I’m desperately busy this year as acting dean of arts, so I’m not getting much writing done. I have, however, been tinkering at my novel,2 & hope to have it revised by late winter or early spring. Would you like to read & criticize it in ms?

As ever, Des
Dear Desmond,

Why do you twist my words? I'm the last person in the world to suppose that poets 'can do no wrong'. I know too many of them personally, my own imperfect self included. As a breed they are selfish, vain, and lazy, with a large streak of narcissism running all the way from their rectums to their left ear. But it seems to me that you're not meeting the main point of my argument--namely, artists do not learn, or learn hardly anything at all, from their critics. The issue here is not one of humility vs arrogance: some artists are humble and some are not, though I wd be tempted to say the very opposite of what you do and assert that the greatest artists have been the most arrogant.

Dante, Milton, Beethoven, Wagner, Shaw, Lawrence, Tolstoy, Pushkin—all VERY humble fellows, weren't they? I think you're confusing the artist with some other chap: could it be a junior prof in the Department of English or minor poets with an apologetic cough? I appreciate the cogency of your reasoning, but there's nothing so sad as having a deductive system destroyed by an empirical fact. Why don't you produce the proof of your assertion—on the face of it, nothing should be simpler. Up to now you have made two statements which if they are right, that is, if they have the evidence to support them ought to hurl me into the malodorous burning pits reserved for all would-be perverters of truth. Your statements are as follows: artists have learned from their critics. Proof? What artists from what critics? Michelangelo from? Shaw from? T.S. Eliot from? Wagner from? Pound from? Picasso from? Yeats from? Epstein from? Robinson Jeffers from? Henry Moore from? Robert Graves from? Yessenin from? Lawrence from? Lorca from?

I could go on for another hundred names with the same casual assurance that despite all your reasoned—your carefully reasoned—protestations you could not discover a single major figure in any of the arts who has ever profited in any measurably significant way from their contemporary critics.

As for your belief that artists are a humble folk, that is a piece of folklore or mythology that must give you some pleasure to hold on to. Let me therefore not be the one to plunge the knife into the soft kidney of your comforting
faith. But when you speak of my 'rhetoric'—do follow it up with something more than the expression of a conventional piety. What I want is evidence. I want you to say to me: "See here, Irving, look at Shaw, now there's a properly humble soul:" and "come, my friend, let us admire the becoming modesty of Ezra Pound:" and "ah, learn from the beatific self-abasement of W.B. Yeats."

Having no evidence, you abuse plaintiff. An old courtroom ruse.

All this that I have said is not the same thing as saying that "poets are a superior breed who can do no wrong." They are not a "superior breed" and "they can do wrong." What I am saying is that Fred and I can learn more from each other than either of us can learn from Frye. The latter can only draw up a general statement, which is useful as far as it goes, but it is not what the practising poet wants or needs. If you did not have a vested emotional and ideological reason for supposing the contrary you would see the truth of what I am saying in a jiffy. An artist—always supposing that he is a vigorous, original one—goes his own way, paying no heed whatever to what anybody is saying about him. He's too busy 'fermenting gases'. Neither abuse nor praise will deflect him, since it is not for these that he's doing what he was put into this world to do. No one can really help him, certainly no one of the tribe of Blackmur, Tate, Richards etc. I ask you again the question which I put to you bluntly in an earlier letter, but which you have decided to leave unanswered: CAN YOU IMAGINE SHAW, OR LAWRENCE, OR POUND GIVING THEIR EAR TO WHAT SOME DEGREE'D REVIEWER OR CRITIC MIGHT HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THEIR WORK?

An artist is "humble" before his OWN lacks not before those of HIS critics. Finally, not "humility" is the distinguishing trait of the great poet or artist, but "ecstasy". Only the bat-eyed will mistake the latter for arrogance.

I am pleased that you approve both of my dedication of the "Bull Calf" to you and of the title of my forthcoming book...Now, look here Des, if I took Frye seriously, would I have written "For Phyllis etc" which I'm more than glad you liked. Eh, answer me that.

Good news about your novel. I hope you're letting yourself go, throwing caution to the wind, sopping up all the fine intuitive juices that I know are in you. I hope your novel is candid, sensuous, and disorderly, a capacious sack into which you have emptied all your guts. I would consider it a great favour if you let me see it in manuscript. Maybe I can say something intelligent and helpful about it. Anyway, I'd try.

All the best, 
Irv

PS But of course, a poet likes to see his work appreciated, intelligently commented on, expounded...
I do not pretend that Frye's review, and recently M. Wilson's \textsuperscript{2} in the \textit{Can Forum} \textsuperscript{3} did not delight me. They did. But neither the one nor the other could have written so perceptively if I hadn't gotten there before them. In that fact lies my main reason for objecting to your conviction that "criticism is creative". How can it be when all criticism is parasitic?

The fleas may need the dog, but the dog can get on very well without the fleas.

\textsuperscript{1}Fred Cogswell.

\textsuperscript{2}Milton Wilson (b. 1923), critic, poetry editor of the \textit{Canadian Forum}, and Professor of English at Trinity College, University of Toronto.


17. \textsuperscript{4}November 9, 1955

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of Saturday. I'm afraid I haven't time to answer it properly--this year is impossibly heavy for me--but if I don't write something now it will get postponed indefinitely.

I don't think I twisted your words when I said you spoke as if poets could do no wrong. I tried to determine the real meaning of 'creation' or 'creative', & you shouted at me that the poets instinctively (or inspiredly) found the right words and that no critic could help them. I still insist that poets often make mistakes, and that mere critics can often point them out to them. I have often made suggestions to Cogswell which he has accepted, & I'm sure this is true of others. After all, Eliot altered the "Wasteland" at Pound's suggestion--Pound is a poet but he was functioning as a critic at that juncture.\textsuperscript{1}

Perhaps I'm wrong to say poets or artists are humble--not all of them are. But read their letters and most of them prove to be. They may wear a public mask of arrogance but they are privately humble. Lawrence is very modest in his letters; Milton was proud but fought his pride in all his poems & made it the cardinal sin\textsuperscript{2}; Shaw loved to pretend to be arrogant but his fake arrogance is an obvious compensation for the lifelong inferiority he felt as an alien Irishman. Keats was humble enough--"writ in water" etc\textsuperscript{2}--& Coleridge was corroded with self-doubt.

Anyway, you've missed my main point if you think it is that contemporary critics have as their main function correcting the errors of contemporary poets. I see that as a very minor role of the critic, & I quite grant that it doesn't often or significantly happen. The critic is creative when he detects a pattern or order or meaning in the literary history or the individual poem of the past. He re-creates if you like. He exercises his superior
sensitivity to show us what we have missed in a Keats ode or a Shakespearean sonnet. I still think that is of the same order of sensitivity as your making us really see the pathos of a killed bull-calf. Neither of you created in any absolute way—you found a new meaning in something which someone else created.

I don’t think I argue on the basis of a vested interest. The role of a critic has been more or less forced on me because people generally seem more ready to admire (& to publish) my criticism than my creative writing. But I don’t puff myself up as a critic—I really would prefer to be a poet or novelist & I make no bones about the admission. But I do think that top-notch criticism is important & creative—& that Coleridge was just as creative when he wrote his Shakespearean criticism as when he wrote his poems.

Are you sure by the way that ecstasy is the mark of the artist? There may be ecstatic work—but did Pope write in ecstasy, or Swift, or Cowper, or Eliot? I think it’s your turn to drop the bloody rhetoric & do some straight thinking.

Why make so much of Northrop Frye? He’d love Phyllis. Didn’t I tell you what Frye used to be like as a student—legendary for his mighty prick (& its exploits!) etc?

My novel will not be at all disorderly. I’m a sloppy person, full of wild enthusiasms & sudden despairs, but I can’t write like that. It’s not that I don’t want to, but when I start to write I inevitably wear a mask of sympathetic tenderness etc etc. The fact is I suppose that I can’t write. But if you read my "That Day in the Bush" in the Forum of a year or so ago you’ll see the only sort of thing I can write. It’s not the gutsy sort of stuff that you talk about—it’s more like Katherine Mansfield than Lawrence.

Enough, you old bull,

Des

---


2In Milton’s Paradise Lost, pride is repeatedly named from Book I on as Satan’s main characteristic and leading motive; pride it was, says the narrator introducing Satan to us, that "cast him out from Heaven" (I, line 37).


4Pacey was an undergraduate at Victoria College, University of Toronto 1934-8; Frye, who had graduated from Victoria in 1933, was a theology student at Emmanuel College 1934-6, spent 1936 in Oxford, and began lecturing at Victoria in 1937.

5See #12:1.
Dear Desmond,

Thanks for your review in the current number of The Fiddlehead. It was fair, perceptive, and sensible. To admit my delight in the craft of poetry and to point out that my "earthiness" is only one of the many masks I assume is wise and gracious criticism. To my knowledge, you're the first responsible reviewer to say a good word for that same "earthiness".

I am grateful to you for the advice you offer me in the middle section and I've taken it in the construction of my forthcoming book, Music on a Kazoo. There are two or three beaux which I've dropped, the four-letter words in them being too explosive. The poem on Smith and Scott, "Where the Wind Listeth" which I showed you in Kingston and which made you laugh so loudly is one of them. But what will you if you'll have me "wither into truth" and respectability. Despite which, I don't think the book a dull one.

Again, many thanks for a really useful review.

Yours,

Irv

PS But why didn't you mention by name one or two of the earthy poems in the BP instead of the uncharacteristic (for that book) "Metamorphosis"?

There's a kind of ambiguity in the review which maybe you can resolve for my thick-headedness: you praise me for my vigour, courage, earthiness, etc, but then you turn about and say that I should speak "softly". And as if to underline your meaning you select for especial praise the two quiet lyrics "Song for Naomi" and "Metamorphosis". But I'm probably carping about something which lack of space wd explain as readily as anything.

Ask Fred to show you the poem "Undine". I don't think he got the drift of it. Tell him to look up Undinism in his Havelock Ellis or Kraft-Ebbing.

All the best,

I

1See 12.7.

2Pacey's review begins by praising Layton:

Mr. Irving Layton is certainly the most prolific of modern Canadian poets—he now has eight volumes to his credit—and in many ways he is the most powerful...If he can maintain his present rate and good quality of production, he will become the most important poet of his generation...

Indeed, these two books make abundantly clear that Mr. Layton is a poet of many moods and manners, and that the earthiness for which he is justly famous is only one of many fascinating masks. He is never dull, and even his failures are rewarding. It is perhaps his greatest virtue that he delights in his craft, and that his own delight is infectious. If poetry is to bring back its public, it is practitioners as frank and enthusiastic as Layton who will turn the trick.

3Layton refers to Pacey's advice:
he adopts an attitude of truculent defiance and aggressive tension which eventually grows tiresome. W.B. Yeats said "out of the quarrel with others we make rhetoric; out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry;" and a good many of Layton's angry verses belong to the first rather than to the second category. Again, his very energy leads him to write and to publish some poems which are unworthy of his talents. Having made his voice heard, he would be well advised now to speak more softly and with more discrimination and restraint.

5"Now I may wither into the truth" (line 4).
8Layton, "Undine" The Bull Calf 43. (Although "Undine" did not appear in The Fiddlehead, apparently Layton had sent it to Cogswell for publication there.)
9Ellis defines the term succinctly in his manual for students:
I have been accustomed to apply the term Undinism to the frequent presence of an early interest in water in general, and the urinary function in particular, persisting in later life. This interest, not amounting to a definite deviation of the sexual impulse, or becoming a substitute for it, is common, especially in women....
10Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), British physician and essayist noted for his investigations of human sexual behavior published in the seven volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1928).
11Baron Richard Von Kraft-Ebbing (1840-1902), German neurologist and Professor of Psychiatry at the universities of Graz and Vienna; author of numerous works on pathological psychology such as *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1892) and *Textbook of Insanity* (1905).

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter about the review.
I haven't the review at hand so can't comment in detail about the apparent inconsistency you mention. What I had in mind was that while I admire your earthiness, I also admire your tenderness, and that I feel you should give the latter more scope. The novice poet may shock to get attention, but when he has won attention, as you have, he can afford to be himself. I know that your self—or one of your selves—is earthy, but you are also sentimental (in the good sense) & you should not be afraid to admit it.

I read the Undine poem and found the imagery confused. I think I get the drift of the poem, but I feel that the meaning is unnecessarily obscured by the failure of the imagery to cohere. Look at it again.

As ever, Des
20. Friday [November 18, 1955]¹

Dear Desmond,

This is a whole lot better than arguing about Criticism vs Creativity--I mean writing poetry. Have had a good month or two of writing. Sorry you don’t go for "Undine"--but I don’t think you get the drift of the poem; the kind of girl I’m describing in it; or the kind of man. The imagery is not confused, but complex. May the gods grant me the inspiration once more to write a love poem as rich & subtle as that one is. Amen.

Yours,
Irving

enclosure: ts "Earth Goddess"²

¹Undated: dated November 18 as it responds to 19 in a spontaneous manner.


Irving Layton, Esq
8035 Kildare Avenue
Cote St Luc,
Montreal, PQ

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your pre—Xmas note¹ and the Marilyn Monroe poem.² I certainly enjoyed the latter very much and feel that it is your true vein.

Perhaps you are right in implying that our argument re creative criticism is better left suspended. My heart has never been more than half in the argument anyway.

I’ve been very busy writing my annual survey of letters in Canada for the New International Yearbook,³ and now I must do some work in preparation for my part in the Royal Society symposium next June.⁴ I also want to complete my book on Ten Canadian Poets,⁵ and I have just been asked to do a 25 week series of broadcasts on High School English next winter.⁶ These things are useful, but do seriously inhibit my chances of more obviously creative work.

All the best for ’56.

Yours sincerely,
Des Pacey

DP/am

PS [ms] Dear Irv--Thanks also for the issue of Origin, which has just arrived in the mail. I’m sure I’ll enjoy it. You’re significantly productive! Des

¹Pacey may be referring to §20 (which may in fact have been written later in November or in December), or he may be referring to a fugitive "pre—Xmas note."

²"Earth Goddess."
Dear Desmond,

Am reading through Frye’s book on Blake—-an excellent work in every way. Frye writes with verve, sympathy and insight. Smith has the mistaken notion that Wm C. Wms is my Master—he isn’t, though of course I’ve learned some tricks from him; but Blake is, as are Isaiah and Amos. B’s view of the creative imagination I long ago made for my own, though in my polemic with you I but expressed it clumsily. There’s a Rintrah and a Palamabron in me as there was in Blake—-my trouble, when it comes upon me, begins when I cannot keep them apart, but confuse them and make them run errands for each other. F’s interpretation of Blake is astonishing and credible though I suspect or anticipate that the weaker portions will show up when he assays his politics. In the main, that’s the central weakness of Cndn criticism, yourself exempted: it is much too literary and seems, to go by the recent comments on my own work, to prefer stasis to movement. I wd also exempt Hugh Kenner whose criticism has a virility and a relevance which puts it in a class by itself.

But all this is to get back with you. I’ve been busy with my forthcoming book The Bull Calf and Other Poems, seeing the printer almost every day and trying to knock some sense into his head concerning such things as types, the right weight of paper, und zo veiter. I think it’s all settled now. The book should be out by the end of this month. Did I write you that it was Music On A Kazoo I was going to publish instead of the BC one? Perhaps. Well, there was a last minute switch, for reasons of economy and others. MOAK will have to wait another year. If I get any gold at all I’ll bring it out and probably add three or four short stories. But all that is a long way off.

Tell Cogswell that Origin ought to be in Canada any day now. That’s the number featuring new Cndn verse. The editor, Cid Corman, announces himself very well pleased
with the contents. Dost think thou and thy friend, FC
couldst sell about 50 copies in yr neighbourhood? The price
wd be 50 cents per copy. I assured Corman I would sell and
distribute 200 copies of the issue in this country, so I
feel myself financially bound for them. Any sort of help
you could give me would be gratefully received. Do write
again when you have a free moment. Bet sends you her
warmest regards.

Yrs,
Irv

PS What's with your novel? Did you like "Mrs. Polinov"?


\[2\] "Mr Layton has taken to heart the dictum of his master, William Carlos Williams: 'Say it:
no ideas but in things'—which doesn’t mean 'no ideas.' These poems are full of ideas..." (590).

\[3\] "The visionary is characterized by the two emotions of wrath and pity, called by Blake
Rintrah and Palamabron" (*Fearful Symmetry* 70). In Blake's mythology, these sons of Los, the genius
of civilized life, represent the prophetic and pastoral modes of poetic discourse, or, to quote Frye
again, they represent the "contrast between the Dionysiac and the Apollonian, the singer of the
dithyramb and the singer of the paean, running all through art" (99)

\[4\] Hugh Kenner (b. 1923), Peterborough-born, longtime Professor at Johns Hopkins University,
one of America's leading literary critics, author of *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (1951), and *Dublin's
Joyce* (1955).

\[5\] Yiddish: "and so forth."

\[6\] *Music on a Kazoo* appeared later in 1956.

\[7\] *Origin* 1st ser. 18 featured the work of ten Canadian poets, including Cogswell and Layton.

\[8\] Sidney ("Cid") Corman (b. 1924), American poet, founder and editor of *Origin* and *Origin

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Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of February 4.

Shall be looking forward to seeing *The Bull Calf*. I'm
glad you're bringing it out rather than *Music on a Kazoo*,
although I shall probably enjoy the latter about as much.
But if the rest of the BC volume comes anywhere near the
level of the title poem it will be tremendous.

Watched Lister Sinclair's "When Soft Voices Die" on
CBC-TV Folio last night. Best thing of his I've ever seen.
It was about Beethoven, & Beethoven reminded me of you--the
same downrightness & force & faith in the creative spirit.
Fred is willing to try to sell Origin around here, but I'd be glad if you arranged that directly with him. That is his baby rather than mine—he has a lot of dealings with bookstores etc in connection with The Fiddlehead.

I haven't had a chance to touch my novel since away back last fall, but I have written a short story recently & have been pushing on with my book of criticism. And my edition of Roberts has just been published by Ryerson.

I liked your poems in that magazine much better than the story. The latter had its moments, but it struck me as formless & diffuse, a sort of rambling anecdote that never really got anywhere. I probably failed to understand it? When I get my story typed I'll send it [to] you for comments.

As ever,
Des

1 Misdated 1955.


3 The story Pacey refers to is probably "The Odour of Incense" (see 31). The book of criticism is Ten Canadian Poets.

4 Sir Charles G.D. Roberts (1860-1943), Fredericton-born "Confederation poet"; author of Orion and Other Poems (1880) and Songs of the Common Day (1893).


February 17, 1956

Dear Desmond,

"We'll go no more a rovin
Me and my Beethoven
--By the light of the watery moon."

Many thanks for the compliment. I was named after B. So were you.

Sorry the lady doesn't go down with you. But "Mrs Polinov" is not a formless anecdote, but one of the tightest stories I ever wrote. For a long while I've been haunted by the "comic element" in the tragic and cruel. What can be funnier than having the testes shot off—as long as they aren't your own! And see my poem "The Comic Element" in the CGE. As the killed man sinks to the ballroom floor he seems to be swaying and rocking in a kind of dance, even executes a dignified piaffer. Funny? But of course.

The lamp "absurd and sinister" is the symbol I chose for the lives of the three actors, Mrs Polinov, her husband & Bruber. In the actions of each, the two elements are inextricably streaked. Mrs Polinov saves her husband through the liberal use of her charms, and the latter has been castrated by the Nazis. Bruber can pursue her, though
the holocaust is fresh in his mind, stayed only when the
smell of the burning flesh becomes too acrid in his
nostrils. I'm convinced that cruelty and sexual frustration
are two sides of the same social coin. Laughter is our way
of spinning it round; the resultant glint pleases.
Sometimes we call that Art. It makes me despair when so
able a critic as yourself misses the point of "Undine", or
can see in "Mrs P" only an anecdote. Do read the story over
again, read it as a dialogue in hell, as the agonized
dialectic of the human spirit of this time and of this
place...Hope you received Origin XVIII. Let me know what
you think of it. Must get to see your Roberts book. What's
yr bk of crit about? The title\(^6\) intrigues me.

Yours,
Irv

---

1Misdated 1957.
2Layton is echoing Byron's "So We'll Go No More A-Roving." Lord Byron: Complete Poetical
3A Layton witticism.
4"And when we looked up we saw
Our brave and silly friend, Nicholas,
Execute a kind of piaffer
On the waxed belly of the dance floor,
5piaffer: (horsemanship) a movement in which the feet are lifted in the same succession as
in the trot, but more slowly (ORD).
6Ten Canadian Poets.

25. February 22, 1956
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your interpretative remarks re "Mrs
Polinov". In the light of them, I shall read the story
again & probably raise my opinion of it. I don't think it's
fair to say that I "missed the point of it" for I did see in
it most of the things you mention. My quarrel is not with
the theme of the story, but with its structure. I like a
story which marches straight forward, & yours seemed to move
too obliquely. But I must read it again (when I can find
it--I've temporarily mislaid it) & then see what I think.

Yes, I have the Canadian number of Origin. It's a good
issue, & should be good propaganda for Canadian poetry.\(^1\)
The F.R. Scott poems are very good, & especially the first
of his own & the first of his translations. Gael Turnbull
eludes me--I don't mean that I can't understand; though that
is sometimes true, but rather that his poems fail to elicit
any response from me. Your "The Way of the World" of course
is superb--as my wife\(^2\) said when she read it, "Layton
certainly writes your kind of poetry!" (I should add that the tone of that remark was appreciative & approving.) Incidentally, it was my wife who liked Dudek's "Dirty Stuff" at first reading, & who persuaded me that it was really a very profound poem. I now quite share her admiration for it. We both also liked his "Eros & Psyche". Souster's poetry of course is very easily assimilable--too much so? He gives me immediate pleasure but I have the feeling that I should soon grow tired of re-reading him. Mandel is just the opposite--I see little in his work at first reading, but it keeps on revealing itself as I go on. Webb & Cogswell are 'slick chicks'--clever, but is there any real weight of passion or experience behind the tricky facade? Just contrast Cogswell's sex with your sex--it's like the difference between commercial fertilizer & a steaming load of barnyard manure! I wish Fred would try to discover himself, to dredge up the depths of his own being, rather than to play variations on the fashionable themes of the day. He approached that in parts of The Stunted Strong, but he's miles away from it in these poems & in The Haloed Tree.

Jay Macpherson--now there's elegance that doesn't mask emptiness but holds in check something that otherwise would explode. These mannered poems remind me of those Chinamen I used to read about in The Boy's Own Annual, who used to be so humble & genteel & yet ready to knife you at the first opportunity!

Well, I think it's about time I gave you a chance to get your claws into some of my writing. I'm sending along two or three pieces on which I'd like to have your frank criticism. I hope you won't resent taking time to read them.

Yours sincerely,

Des Pacey


1*Origin*, 1st ser. 18, featured work by ten Canadian poets:
Louis Dudek, "Dirty Stuff," "Eros and Psyche," "To an Unknown in a Restaurant," "Monkeys: Conspicuous Consumption" (87-89) and "The New Laocoön" (118-20).
Phyllis Webb, "Sonnet" and "Summer" (102-03).
Fred Cogswell, "Death Watch" and "The Widower" (104-05).
Daryl Hine, "The Lesson of Anatomy" (109).
2Mary Elizabeth (Carson) Pacey (b. 1915), artist and photographer who has shown her work in solo exhibitions in Montreal, Ottawa, and the Maritimes.


Cogswell, The Haloed Tree (Toronto: Ryerson, 1956).

5Jay Macpherson (b. 1931) poet (The Boatman 1957, Welcoming Disaster 1974), a key figure in the "mythopoeic school" of poets inspired by the criticism of Northrop Frye.

6“The Misses York,” Canadian Short Stories CBC Radio

"New Zealand Memories," unpublished.

"A Cabin by the Sea," BBC Radio 1961; see 352.3.


"Silo" and "The Picnic": see 12.1.

March 8, 1956

Dear Desmond,

Your manuscript, all battered, arrived about eight or ten days ago. I should have written to you at once to set your mind at rest—please excuse my failure to do [so far] you.

The last three weeks have been very hectic ones. Tomorrow the Bull Calf is coming out. What a battle it has been! At the last moment I discovered that my new printer knew less than nothing about setting up a book. Result—I had to spend days instructing him and finally spent two whole days (till 11 PM) of last weekend running off the bk with him. Luckily, I still remembered some few things from my early First Statement days. Without that knowledge, I would have been in a pretty fix.

I’ll mail you a copy first thing Sunday. Perhaps you or Cogswell or someone else may want to review it for Fiddlehead.2 Isn’t the latter somewhat overdue?

Glad you liked the issue of Origin. I suppose all the poets have better work than what appeared in Origin, but it was their most recent work I asked for and that is what they sent me. Like yourself, I’m a great admirer of J.M.3 She’s got something on the [ball]—will write abt your stories on Sunday.

All the best,

Irving

1See 3.3.


3Jay Macpherson.
Dear Desmond,

This in very great haste. The Bull Calf made it finally, came out yesterday afternoon, and at night I had a small party to celebrate the event. What a relief to have it off my mind! Today I spent mailing out copies to reviewers and friends. You ought to be getting your copy with this letter, or a day earlier. You know I told you that I had dedicated "The Bull Calf" to you since you had liked the poem so much.1 But the damned booby of a printer forgot to put the dedication in—I could have murdered him for that, and that most cheerfully. If you say the word I’ll still do it.

Last week, what with all my anxieties I yet managed to write eight poems, among them two very fine things. They’ll all go into my Music On A Kazoo which has already swelled into a thick book of fifty poems and half-a-dozen short stories. But I’m RESOLVED to refrain from publishing for the next three years, though the bug having gotten into me, the Lord knows whether I shall be able to hold out that long.2 But I shall pray for strength!

Look, I’ve put in for a Royal Fellowship and I’ve given your name as one of my champions. Will you please send a letter to the Awards Committee3 telling them what you know about me (the nice things) and why such a Fellowship grant wd do wonderful things for my poetry...and possibly the country. I would be most grateful and appreciative.

Dudek was very happy with your remarks about his poetry. So was Frank Scott.4 What vain creatures we poets are...I am now settling down to an evening’s readings of Desmond Pacey.

All the best,
Irving

PS Kindly address your letter to:
Awards Committee
The Royal Society of Canada
National Research Building,
Ottawa, Canada

1See 14.

2Both Music on a Kazoo (Toronto: Contact) and The Improved Binoculars (Highlands, NC: Jonathan Williams) appeared later in the year.

3Desmond Pacey, letter to the Awards Committee, Royal Society of Canada, 20 Mar. 1956, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

4The remarks contained in 25.
28.[ts] March 17, 1956

Dear Desmond,

Let me write this provisional note on your short stories, and revise and modify my opinion in subsequent letters to you.

"The Misses York" is not a story, nor do I imagine you consider it as such, but a magazine article and at this date rather an untimely one. Whatever is good in it is fouled up by a lot of dull writing, the most terrifying example of which is page two. Who in the hell wants to know what you have for breakfast? Are you Glubb Pasha? That sort of thing should be suggested in about two or three sentences, but you go on till page 3, and even in the following page I note that you have not lost the trail of the brussel sprouts. Too many 'wases and ises'. Too many abstractions..."it was in this capacity" etc. By the time the bored reader has finished your lamentable tale, he has a distinct impression that the bomb fell on the wrong people.

"New Zealand Memories". The value of anything like that, I feel, depends upon three things: originality, psychological insight, colour. Memories as such are unimportant and should be kept for one's anec-dotage. In this story, or rather 'fragment from an unfinished autobiography', it is not the smooth flow of the river that interests me, but what the river carries with it in its tug and punch. Here, what you lack in sensitivity, you try to make up for by painstaking factual description. It won't do. What I want to know is how you felt. I want to crawl inside your hide, touch, taste, and smell with you. What were your grandfather's hands like, what happened to the wrinkles on his neck when he turned his head, or when he merely laughed? All that you can do is mutter with Thomas Hood, "I remember...I remember." The net result is that "NZM" takes on a remoteness that has nothing to do with the passage of time. The writing itself lacks immediacy, concreteness. It is as though you were walking around yourself with only a fractional part of your senses alive. Memories, those poor pale ghosts of living, be damned! What's wanted are sensations, as alivey raw and tingling as you can make them.

"A Cabin By The Sea" is too pat and too dully written to even make Maclean's or Liberty. You give the impression both here and in your other stories of writing to a thesis; there's something woefully doctrinaire about them. Human beings are unpredictable and spontaneous, your stories certainly show that you're aware of that, but a trick ending is no substitute for that inner dramatic rhythm which the storyteller has got to have to make his situations and characters credible. This story, as well as "Silo", suffers from secondhand telling. You indicate the emotions you expect the reader to have, but you don't gain them in the only way open to you--by dramatizing. And since you insist on walking around your characters they never take on flesh and blood, you see them from the outside, and you never see
them as individuals but as pieces of cardboard. "The smooth white curve of her breasts and hips"...really? That's not a real woman, but a wet dream. And would it occur to them, folks solidly married these many years, that "they had to undress in full view of one another on the beach"? It might at that...if they were English, or Canadian. Good old Anglo-Saxon prurience!

In "Silo", you tell me that George's eyes took on a cold glitter, the anger was going to be something tremendously awful and then you have him go on for a full page in the most wonderfully structured English...To be continued.

Yours,
Irving

1Sir John Bagot Glubb (1897-1986), British soldier who organized the Arab Legion in Jordan, which he commanded from 1939-45, popularly known as "Glubb Pasha".

2Thomas Hood (1799-1845), British poet and pioneer editor of the humorous family magazine, author of humorous verse and undistinctive Romantic verse.


4Maclean's ("Canada's weekly newsmagazine") was established in Toronto in 1905 and continues today; Liberty was a Canadian edition of an American magazine of the same name (Liberty "a Weekly for Everybody") published in New York and Chicago 1932-47, appearing as New Liberty 1947-55.

29.[ts; marginalia] March 20, 1956

Mr. Irving Layton,
8035 Kildare Avenue
Cote St Luc, Quebec

Dear Irving,
I have several letters of yours to answer, and I'll take them in chronological order.

March 8. I expect I shall review the Bull Calf for the Fiddlehead. It has some excellent stuff in it. The title poem reads as well as ever, though I don't like the last line--it's the sugar in the bottom of the cup. Other excellent poems are "The Statuettes", "Spikes", "The Fertile Muck", "Song for a Late Hour", "The Way of the World", "Undine" (yes, I've changed my mind about it--partly under my wife's persuasion) and "Earth Goddess".

Re: Jay Macpherson--did you see her recent group of poems in the March Canadian Forum?2 Such a delicious combination of innocence, sauciness, and literary sophistication! She's a real comer, that girl, unless I miss my bet.

March 12. Am very hurt by failure of dedication to appear. Shall never forgive you. I am writing to the Royal Society, however, as one last favour before retiring into a shell of sulky anger.
March 17. Well, you are certainly letting me have it with both barrels! I forget now just what stories I did send you, but in general they were ones I was not satisfied with myself and wanted some help with. "The Misses York" I recently sent to Venture and they wrote me a long criticism, the gist of which was that it was a very fine story but that I should have made explicit the idea that these two maiden ladies were to some extent deserving of their fate, since their indifference had helped to bring on the war. I couldn’t see that--on the other hand I can’t see why you say it isn’t a story, since it is almost all imaginary. I did have a Cambridge landlady who served me the same food in rotation--but my point in bringing this into the story was to suggest the unimaginative routine of their lives. These were the kind of people the bombs killed--dull, stupid, but still human. Obviously I didn’t communicate as far as you were concerned, but my point about "monstrous irregularity" was that if we aren’t to become as extinct as the dinosaur we must use our imaginations to adjust to the possibility of such irregularity. [Of course this isn’t the whole story by any means!]

As for "New Zealand Memories", it was not intended as a story, but as a bit of autobiography. I feel that it is of slight interest to anyone except my friends, but I don’t think it is lacking in the kind of immediacy you talk about. I tried to do just what you say I should do--get the touch, taste, smell of things. I perhaps faded away from that as I went on, but it certainly begins concretely enough. As for the ghostly quality you speak of, I was aiming for that. I was trying to say, "How real this was--I can still smell and taste it!--and yet was it ever real, did I not perhaps only dream it?" Don’t you have that feeling about your own childhood?

I know "Cabin By the Sea" is a failure. [The idea of this story came from a desolate stretch of NB coast we once stumbled on--still think it wd make a good setting for a story.] I tried to write a Maclean’s type story and just couldn’t. As for the "smooth white curve, etc.", I find it doesn’t work for me to write about sex. I become coy and embarrassed--perhaps I’m a puritan at heart!

"Silo" is a story I wrote ten years or so ago, and although I admit it has faults I still think it has a core of insight. The silo was to me a phallic symbol, and I was trying to suggest the whole nature of the couple’s relationship in terms of their attitude to the silo.

About six weeks ago I wrote a story which Atlantic Monthly has now held for five weeks. I think you would like it better than any of these. But I am quite willing to admit that my own creative writing stops far short of meeting my own critical standards, and that is why I don’t do more of it. It’s relatively pale and gutless--perhaps as a result of reading too many Katherine Mansfield stories as a kid.

Sincerely yours,
Desmond Pacey
April 2, 1956

Dear Desmond,

To get back with you. First of all let me thank you for your kind observations on the Bull Calf. The poems you picked are also favourites of my own. One thing I wonder about is whether the organic nature of the book comes through to the reader. My answer to the death of the bull calf is the creative principle (sex) and history. I reject both religion and mysticism, but unlike the optimistic liberal and humanitarian I think I show some awareness of the dark antimonies that make up our common human nature. Nevertheless, my cry is for "Light, more light".1 It pleases me immensely that you like my earthiness; I believe you are the first Canadian critic to have spoken approvingly of it. I doubt whether any other but yourself will appreciate the lyrical glory of "Earth Goddess" or "Undine". But perhaps the climate has changed and I shall be proven wrong. Certainly if they see the drift and intent of the book as a whole, they will see that I’m not merely writing sex poetry though let me hasten to add there’s nothing wrong with that, but like Yeats and others I am using sex and the creative urge interchangeably. But enough of that.

I hope you don’t get the idea from my criticism of your stories that you can’t write them. You can and you’re going on to do big things. You have a genuine flair for the short story as an art form, and that’s more than three-quarters of the battle fought and won. My feeling is that you don’t cut loose sufficiently. You rely too much on memory and observation, not enough on your imagination. There’s some good writing in all of your stories, but that which is good is overborne by much that is merely trivial or uninteresting. In a short story, that is fatal, because that art form demands the same kind of compression and intensity as a good poem does. You can not buy time with space; the dull and the trivial must be tucked away under the carpets; what must emerge is colour, movement, vitality. One suggests boredom, one does not bore the reader. That I feel is what is wrong with "The Misses York" story. Then again, your stories are much too logical——life is simply not like that. Your stories should not aim at truth but at versimilitude and suggest the spontaneity, contradoritoriness and irrationality of people. Try getting out and away from yourself; a storyteller is interested in the lives of the people around him. Then——aren’t your stories just a trifle on the didactic side? I feel that’s what’s amiss with "The
Picnic", as if everything had been described to lead up to that one pale reflection at the end—THERE BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD ETC... Treat things and events with respect; if they have anything to say, let them say it for themselves. You very likely won’t go with me but I got the most pleasure out of "Odour of Incense" (I’m not saying it’s the best story of the lot). Some of the decor was arranged with too heavy a hand—"as if the shrubs were brooding over some dreadful secret" etc. But you got across the feel of the place, and the boy’s sensations, and the mother’s inner turmoil. There is a good deal of sensitive writing in this story. Your weakness is in the handling of conversation. It is much too static, too much for a given set purpose, plunked down like a huge cardboard box in the middle of a desert. Get hold of the stories of LIAM O’FLAHERTY. He has much to teach anyone who’s keen on writing short stories. There’s also a book called The Craft of the Short Story that you might find helpful. Its author is Richard Summers and the book is put out by Rinehart. Finally, your deficiencies are not those of talent, but technique. You have a sensitive, exploratory mind and a very warm heart and an interest in people. The rest is just a matter of practicing scales, finger exercises. Write when you can.

Yrs,
Irving

1Goethe’s last words were "More light!"

2Liam O’Flaherty (1896-1984), Irish novelist and short story writer; his volumes of stories include Spring Sowing (1924), The Fairy Goose and Other Stories (1927) and The Short Stories of Liam O’Flaherty (1937).


31. April 10, 1956
Dear Irving,

It was very sweet of you to send the special copy of The Bull Calf for Mary. She was honestly thrilled by your kindness, & the enclosed letter is her spontaneous tribute.1 She has had a hard winter, trying to squeeze in some painting & drawing amid the distractions of raising seven kids,2 & your gift came as a spring tonic.

By the way, there’s a point there that you seem to me to evade in your poetry. Suppose one does go all out for sex as the supreme good of life, as Mary & I have done—what about the consequences in terms of drudgery, lack of mobility etc? If sex is to be thoroughly enjoyed, and the two partners are normally fertile, the result is going to be a large family. And though that is fun in a way, it is also a hell of a responsibility & a chore.

Thank you for your continued comments on my stories. You are more favourable this time, but I can’t help wondering whether you really mean it. I don’t think very
highly of them myself. At least they don’t seem to communicate very successfully. In "The Picnic" for example, the point is not "There but for the grace of God" etc--what I tried to show were three possible attitudes to the killer: the children’s, which is amoral; the wife’s & society’s, which is moral; & the man’s which is "to understand all is to forgive all". And in so far as any point of view triumphs, it is that of the children & their feeling that a man who gives them a stick of gum must be a good guy.

I’d forgotten I’d sent you "The Odour of Incense". The Atlantic Monthly has had that story since February 20, & still has not rejected it. My previous record with them was six weeks, & then I got a personal letter from the editor--so I’m really getting excited this time. You certainly have a good nose for my faults. The day your letter came I’d been reading the story over in the morning, & had been put off myself by that sentence about "brooding over some dreadful secret". My worst fault is a desire--born of pedagogy, I suppose--to make things too explicit.

Funny you should tell me to read O’Flaherty. I’d brought a book of his stories home from the library just two days earlier!

Of course everything you say about writing short stories I tell my students every year. It’s not that I don’t know how--but that I ignore my own principles.

Another weakness of mine which you pinpoint is my egocentricity as a writer. I don’t stick to my own experience, but experience always has to be the starting place, & I can’t imagine a character fundamentally unlike myself. That’s why that "Cabin By The Sea" piece is so horrible--I just couldn’t imagine what it would really feel like to dislike your wife (or anyone) so much you would consider murdering them.

More later, Regards,
Des

enclosure: letter from Mary Pacey

1 Fugitive.

2 Philip Desmond Pacey b. 8 Oct. 1941.
Mary Ann Pamela Pacey (Johnson) b. 8 Oct. 1944.
Patricia Elizabeth Pacey (Thornton) b. 11 June 1946.
William Holford Peter Pacey b. 9 Feb. 1948.
Margaret Helen Ateva Pacey (Greenwell) b. 20 Oct. 1950.
John David Michael Pacey b. 20 Dec. 1952.
Penelope Jane Pacey (Smith) b. 13 Apr. 1955.

32.

80325 Kildare Ave,
Côte St Luc
April 23, 1956

Dear Mary,

You and my wife, Betty, ought to come together. Winter is a sad time for her also; mountains of depressing snow
piled up outside our windows and equally depressing bungalows finished or in construction. When we first came to Côte St Luc, there were fields and fields of nothing but grass and lovely hedges, trees all over the place. Alas, what a change! Now we have all the disadvantages of living on the outskirts of the city with none of the compensatory advantages. We’ll probably move, and leave suburbia for the suburbanites.

Desmond told me you painted. Bet does too. This winter she got started on some really fine things, changing her style considerably, more bold and experimental while keeping all her good draughtsmanlike qualities. Of course it easier for her than for you, her brood is not so numerous—but I wish to hell I cd whisk her off to Italy and France where she might have a chance to look at some really good pictures and mix with some excited Frenchmen and Italians. God, I don’t think we’d ever want to come back!

I’m delighted with your reception of the Bull Calf. If the book gave you a lift when you needed it—hell, that’s what poetry is for. I’m sure if you and Des were here in Montreal we’d make a great foursome. What are the chances of yr accompanying him when he comes to the big Humanities Pow Wow? It would be grand for Bet and me to meet you.

All the best, Mary,
Irv

33.
8035 Kildare Ave,
Côte St Luc, Que
April 24, 1956

Dear Desmond,

Yes, sex, as much as one’s system needs & can take, and not only of the legalized love-making variety, but anywhere and with anyone who can kindle and re-kindle the sacred flame. Even with one’s own wife, and solely. The thing is much too important to trifle with. Most men and women go about like corpses or zombies, because they’re badly repressed by conventional fears. He’d be mankind’s greatest benefactor who could persuade it (mankind) that the ecstasy of sex is a wholesome good that’s entirely independent of the foolish moralities which have been erected by the fear-ridden and the unadventurous. I believe that a great change is on the way, one that Freud started, but which will go beyond anything even he dreamed of.

Yes, sex—but have you never heard of contraception!!! Or unorthodox ways of love-making which the puritanical leave with a horrified shudder to the gaily uninhibited!!!

Aw hell, you’re probably pulling my leg. Anyway, you have my credo for what it’s worth. Mine, and Blake’s and Shelley’s.

Last week a panel discussion on "Poetry in Canada" was held at McGill.¹ Frank Scott, Klein, and Dudek were the panellists, with Dr Files² of the English department acting as the chairman. I don’t know whether it was the latter’s
fault or whether the poets were out of sorts, but the affair turned out to be a terribly dull one, in which Files asked the questions, and the poets answered back "yes" or "no". Gruesomely catechistic! All four of them squirming on the pot, so much so, my bowels began to churn in gastronomic empathy and I was forced to leave the lecture room to relieve myself. May we all be spared from panel discussions on poetry: at least of the antiseptic, therapeutic, hygienic, wisdom-and-bilgewater kind as I listened to last Thursday night.

Glad your wife liked the Bull Calf and that it gave her a lift. I was greatly moved by her friendly letter. All the best to both of you.

Yrs,
Irv

PS Why do you [say] I'm too kind? Didn't I hit the best story--the one you say Atlantic has kept for more than six weeks?

1"Poetry in Canada" panel discussion, with F.R. Scott, Louis Dudek and A.M. Klein, Chairman Dr. Files, McGill University, 19 April 1956.

2Harold Files (1895—1982), Head of the English Department at McGill University 1947-56; retired in 1964.

April 30, 1956
Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of April 24. Your vehemence in preaching sex to me is rather ironic --carrying coals to Newcastle, by Gar! And it's all right for you to talk of contraception and of unorthodox ways of love-making (I like 'em all!), but if you're going to have intercourse two or three times a day every day for 17 years there are almost certain to be a few conceptions no matter how careful you may be most of the time. Anyway this bloody business of putting in or on rubbers takes half the fun out of it, and once in a while you just say to hell with it & go swimming naked. And as for these unorthodox techniques you speak of so periphrastically (I'm surprised at you!), the French way is fun for a change but eventually it cloys and one wants to go at it again in the good old English way with the blood beating like hell--both partners at the same time --& without having to reverse positions into a 69 or any other damned contortion.

The inescapable fact remains that if you are really going to enjoy sex to the full you are going to acquire children, & these being responsibilities and restrictions, I wonder whether the fact that most of the professional prophets of sex (D.H. Lawrence, for example) have no children indicates that they talked a lot about sex to compensate for their own near—impotence? If you really go at it at a good clip you haven't much energy left for talking about it!
Atlantic M have just returned the "Odour of Incense" story after nine weeks—a new record, but still a rejection. I’m now trying Harper’s with it.

Mary loved the poems you sent her. She’ll probably be writing you soon.

As ever,

Des

35. May 7, 1956

Dear Desmond,

Thank you for your very amusing letter and putting me ever so neatly in my place. Don’t mind my rage. In that way I work off a lot of steam which otherwise would burst the boilers in my head: keeps me sane and balanced for my friends. It’s my correspondents who must suffer...Anyway, you’ll have to admit, my erotic superman (3 times a day, whew!...I can’t manage that many in a wk) that the surface facts were against you. How was I to suspect that anyone from New Zealand was such a hot-blooded creature and that given the laws of probability, seven blessed events like luminous milestones, were bound to arise to mark the course of your rigorous lechery? Anyway, here’s to you...may your prostate hold out!

I was delighted with your Roberts’ book. The introduction is one of the best things you’ve done. An honest appraisal that will stand. It baffles me that Sir Charles cd have been in France & Germany when he was and not get to know the exciting new poetry that was being written by men like Apollinaire, Rilke, George.

My publisher sent me Wm C. Wms’ foreword to The Improved Binoculars. It makes Smith’s eulogy in the QQ seem modest & reluctant by comparison. Hails me as...but I’ll keep you guessing until you read the thing for yourself if and when the bk appears. But one thing, let me assure you. It has had no effect on me whatsoever: I remain the same conceited pig as before. But seriously, it’s a good intro. Let it be for others to say that it’s extravagant. It wd be hypocritical of me to make a disclaimer.

Love to you & Mary,

Irv

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1Pacey was born May 1, 1917 in Dunedin, New Zealand. He emigrated to England with his mother (his father having been killed in World War I) in 1924 at the age of seven, and again to Canada in 1931 at the age of fourteen.

2Desmond Pacey, "Introduction," The Selected Poems of Sir Charles G.D. Roberts i-xxv.

3"He was forever on the move: from New York he went on, in 1907, to Paris, thence to Munich, and then to London, which served as his headquarters from 1912 to 1925." (xviii)

4Williams’ foreword contains high praise for Layton:

What else are you going to say about a man whose work you whole-heartedly admire than that he is a good poet? When I first clapped eyes on the poems of Irving
Layton, two years ago, I let out a yell of joy....He has an unrivaled choice of words; an unusual vocabulary and the ability to use it. As far as deftness in the craft of a poet, I think he can do anything he wants to....

William Carlos Williams, "A Note on Layton," Foreword to The Improved Binoculars by Irving Layton (Highlands, NC: Jonathan Williams, 1956) 9-10.

8035 Kildare Ave, Côte St Luc, Que
August 27, 1956

Dear Mary,

I think I owe you both an apology and an explanation.

Louise Scott¹, now back in Montreal, tells me you received Music on a Kazoo and therefore you will have noticed that the promised dedication of "Two Ladies at Traymore's"² failed to appear. I can imagine only too painfully the talk that went on between you and Desmond. But can I help it if the Paceys are an unlucky clan, or that they are capable at such a far distance of casting a spell upon my printer, jinxing up the whole works?

Do you know what went wrong this time? The poem "The Dwarf"³ was so printed that the end was put at the beginning and the beginning where the end was supposed to be. And since I am both imprudent and improvident I threw all the type into the pail, not waiting until the conclusion of the job. To get the four pages set up again would have meant an extra outlay of about thirty dollars, a sum I could ill afford. It meant that I had to pick out more than 1,000 lines of dusty, inked type, read the lead backwards and make up those four pages again. It took me, and the printer, more than two full afternoons to do that. In the confusion the dedicatory line to yourself had got mislaid, and by now the printer was too exasperated at the loss of time to wish to lose anymore which getting another made would have entailed; I was loathe to add to the poor man's troubles. There's the whole sad story. I hope my explanation will somewhat assuage your wounded feelings, if you have any, and myself restore to your good graces. I should be very unhappy if I thought I was out of favour with you.

Please tell Desmond that his dedication will appear in The Improved Binoculars--unless the Pacey jinx can mess things up even as far as North Carolina. But I think not. We've had a quiet summer, not much poetry, but a good play written together with Ls Dudek⁴ which the CBC might take.

Yours,
Irving

¹Louise Scott (b. 1930), Montreal artist, Betty Layton’s cousin.
²Irving Layton, "Two Ladies at Traymore’s," Music on a Kazoo 32.
37.

August 30, 1956

Dear Desmond,

The Fiddlehead blew in this morning with your lively and excellent review of The Bull Calf etc. Many and many thanks for all the very kind and very shrewd observations on me and my work. In part the "arrogance" is a protective device to conceal what I think your wife suspects is a certain shyness with people that my nature owns; in larger measure it's the triumphant affirmation of the poet's role in a world that's gone deaf, dumb, and blind.

I am sorry that you should think I was making a cheap gibe at a man who is slowly dying a very painful death and with whom I in the past shared many comradely, if sometimes formidable, hours. It was John Sutherland who introduced me to modern poetry. He was the first in Canada to publish my verse and the first to champion that verse vigorously in article and review. The differences that arose between us later were not personal, they were ideological. I thought at the time, and still do, that his conversion to Catholicism and his earlier defection from modern thought and sensibility were wrong, and so timed & motivated as to give a blow to Canadian poetry from which it is only now beginning to recover. You will recall how the critics & anthologists five years ago were assuring us that the poetic ferment of the forties had come to a sudden and dismal halt. Since I was in the possession of certain facts concealed from all of them I said "blow" to all that. I knew that Dudek, Souster, myself, Page, Anderson, etc etc, were still writing as vigorously as ever, but that JS was returning their manuscripts; for having persuaded himself that there was now a graveyard or a bombed crater where there had been a busy intersection of traffic he felt it incumbent upon himself to produce the evidence. What better way than to refuse to print what was being written? To send back the manuscripts and say that nobody was writing anymore?

Now I know for certain, but I don't expect you to believe me, that what finally drove Sutherland to his defection, and subsequently to his conversion to Catholicism was disillusionment with himself as a poet, and that his borrowed convictions were rationalizations for something he could not face up to about himself and his lack of real poetic talent. Both Dudek and his sister who with me knew him about as well as anyone ever has, would agree with me here.

John became for me therefore a symbol for all those who begin with vigour and dash and then falter, and faltering creep into the folds of the Catholic church, that hospitable slop-pail for all the sick and weary. I hate their gray breath, their diseased dreams. John was not the first to so begin and so end: nor will he be the last. Think of the Lawrencians, the Marxists, and the Freudians who one by one have doffed their secular and pagan pride, and now do penance in rags at the Church door. I do not like them—am I wrong to say so? I might have used some other allusion
instead of Sutherland but I know him and his destiny best of all: why look for devils in foreign garb or alien lands? The Hebrew prophets always addressed themselves to their contemporaries, face to face. I have done no more than they did. If you censure me, you must censure them, or anyone else who seeing what he thinks is an evil, names it...But it may be that Canadians are not yet ready for that kind of directness. You, like them, find it hard to believe that a man may be in dead earnest about ideas and sensibilities, and that intellectual differences can be sincerely and openly and honestly stated without the slightest personal rancor or ill-feeling.

Indeed, so free am I from such uncharitable feelings that, as I may have written you before, I had thought, together with Dudek, of bringing out a volume of John’s essays and reviews that would cover the entire span of his critical activity. Only his wife’s refusal to let us go ahead with it made us drop the plan.

As for "self-pity"—we all have a bit of that in us. After all, if I have compassion for a chokecherry leaf, a mosquito, or a dead fish floating in the water, why shouldn’t I also have some for myself? I am, at the least, as much deserving...

Anyway, it was one of the liveliest reviews that you’ve yet written, with punch and forthrightness. I can’t complain, and I don’t. May you live long and write many more such excellent pieces. Regards to Mary.

Yrs,
Irving

PS Betty sends her love to both of you.

enclosure: ts "Bookseller" and "Obit"

1 See 26.2.

2 Pacey’s review twice refers to Layton’s arrogance:

Irving Layton is a man of many masks. He can be tender, sensual, arrogant, self-pitying, humorous, coarse....

Layton’s arrogance is such an honest arrogance that, like Falstaff’s so palpable falsehoods, it attracts rather than repels us. Its finest expression here is in "On Seeing the Statuettes of Ezekiel and Jeremiah in the Church of Notre Dame," which conveys a fierce pride of race in great rolling lines of unashamed rhetoric:

Embedded in this otherwise fine poem, however, is a trace of the angry Layton whom I don’t always like. He goes out of his way, it seems to me, to take a poke at John Sutherland and his wife (29-30).

3 ...those morbidly religious
i.e. my prize brother-in-law
ex-lawrencian
pawing his rosary,
and his wife
sick with many guilts."
Lines 12-16, "On Seeing the Statuettes of Ezekiel and Jeremiah in the Church of Notre Dame," The Bull Calf 16-17.

4 Layton’s wife Betty was John Sutherland’s sister.

5 Audrey (Aikman) Sutherland (b. 1924); a founder of First Statement.

6 Layton is referring to several poems from The Bull Calf, including the first three poems—the title poem (9-10), "Mosquito" (11), and "Chokecherries" (12)—and "One View of Dead Fish" (45).

7 Irving Layton, "Bookseller," Music on a Kazoo 38.

8 Layton, "Obit," see 40.1.

September 5, 1956

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of Aug 30—I am glad you liked my review of The Bull Calf. You will be interested to know that I have also reviewed it—along with six other recent books of verse1 such as Webb, Cohen, Watson,2 Wilkinson3—in a review article to appear in the Fall Queen’s Quarterly. I hope you will tell me frankly what you think of the Queen’s job for I for once feel that I have done something well.

I should have written long ago to thank you for Music on a Kazoo but it arrived at a time when I was both very busy & very disturbed. We had a huge Summer School this year—over 1100 students—and I was swamped with students in Creative Writing, 17th C Lit, & Victorian Poetry. Then Mary became ill—a series of haemmorhages—in the midst of things, & for a while the prospect was a major operation for her. We expected to have to cancel our projected visit to Kingston, but at the last minute things improved & we left here on August 15. We had three good weeks—I accumulating notes in the Lorne Pierce Collection, Mary painting, & the kids swimming in the St Lawrence River. Mary is to go into a hospital for a minor operation this week, & we are hoping that no serious condition will reveal itself.

I am swamped with work on my return—a 500p ms on the Canadian novel to appraise for the Humanities Research Council, two MA theses to read, Dorothy Livesay’s Selected Poems to write an introduction6 for, fifty exam papers for High School license to mark, my 500 pp. of Kingston notes to sort & file, my book on poetry to complete for Pierce by October—and lectures to get ready! My God, who ever said professors have a soft life?

So Sutherland is dead!6 I’m so glad I took time a month ago to write & congratulate him on the new issue of NR7—which had some of the old liveliness. You are probably right about his motives etc—still I can’t help feeling that we are all so guilty & vulnerable that it behoves us to be charitable to all except the real enemies of light. I think that Sutherland in his confused & probably mistaken way was honestly groping for light, & that he was a pathetic or
tragic rather than malicious person. And he had some
terrific insights—particularly a gift for invective.
I see Dudek is still hammering at the critics (in
Summer QQ)\textsuperscript{8}—& you too in your poems!\textsuperscript{9} Well, I could argue
with you again, but I really enjoy all the sparring so I’ll
let it go! I’ll probably be reviewing Music somewhere, so
I’ll save my comments for then.\textsuperscript{10} I’ll only say that I
enjoyed the vitality of the book, especially "For Phyllis"
"Imaginary Conversation" & above all "The Way the World
Ends" (that’s a corker!).

Love to yourself & Betty. It’s good to get your
letters. Mary will probably answer hers separately—but she
wasn’t at all hurt about the dedication. But I was a bit
hurt to see the book dedicated to Smith,\textsuperscript{11} if you want the
truth!

Des

\textsuperscript{1}Desmond Pacey, "A Group of Seven," rev. of Even Your Right Eye by Phyllis Webb, The
Hangman Ties The Holly by Anne Wilkinson, The Selected Poems of Raymond Souster, Let Us Compare
Mythologies by Leonard Cohen, Friday’s Child by Wilfred Watson, The Haloed Tree by Fred Cogswell and

\textsuperscript{2}Wilfred Watson (b. 1911) playwright and poet, Professor of English at the University of
Alberta, author of Friday’s Child (1955; Governor General’s Award for Poetry) and (with Marshall

\textsuperscript{3}Anne Wilkinson (1910-1961), poet (Counterpoint to Sleep 1951, The Hangman Ties the Holly
1955), a founding editor of Tamarack Review.

\textsuperscript{4}Lorne Pierce (1890-1964), editor of Ryerson Press (1922-60) and ardent supporter of
Canadian literature and Canadian writers; author of An Outline of Canadian Literature (1927), A
Canadian People (1945), and A Canadian Nation (1960).

\textsuperscript{5}Desmond Pacey, "Introduction," The Selected Poems of Dorothy Livesay (Toronto: Ryerson,
1957) 11-19.

\textsuperscript{6}John Sutherland died on 1 September 1956.

\textsuperscript{7}The final issue of Northern Review 7.4 (Summer, 1956).

\textsuperscript{8}Louis Dudek, "Layton Now and Then: Our Critical Assumptions," Queen’s Quarterly LXIII, 2
(Summer 1956): 291-93.

\textsuperscript{9}The poems contained in Music on a Kazoo, which Pacey had just received, such as

\textsuperscript{10}Pacey did not review Music on a Kazoo.

\textsuperscript{11}Music on a Kazoo bears the dedication "For A.J.M. Smith."
39. [pc]  Wednesday [September 13, 1956pm]

Dear Desmond,

What I want to know is how do you ever get the time to write a letter? I used to think I was busy until I got your schedule. Wow! School has started and I'm back with my classes teaching Lit, Comp, grammar, Latin etc. Bright students; really a lot of fun! I'll be looking forward to reading your review article in the QQ. There's a vacancy open to a really good Canadian critic—I don't see why the GCC shouldn't be you. You're not as vulnerable as Smith with his 18th c aristocratic bias and pseudo-classicism, nor as Frye with his "ideologism". You've got warmth, a feeling for life and humanity. Like Lawrence, your motto is "Art for Life's Sake." That's my own too. You'll discover that the only critics I rib are those who reverse that motto—please remember me to Mary and tell her that I was made very happy by her letter. Smith got the dedication because I felt he'd got lots of brickbats from everyone—including myself—and precious few thanks for some of the fine things he has done for Canadian letters...Betty joins me in sending warmest love to you and Mary.

Yrs,
Irving

1Good Canadian Critic.

40.  September 27, [1956]

Dear Irving,

Thanks for the poems you have been sending. I've enjoyed them, especially "Obit"—though I wonder what your wife thinks of your distrust of her fidelity?

I enclose an article of mine which I wrote in response to an urgent appeal for material for the Author & Bookman. It's superficial but does express some of my convictions.

I've been invited to become editor of The Canadian Poetry Magazine. As you know, it has been a pretty terrible rag since Pratt & later Birney edited it in the late thirties & early forties. Do you think it is irrevocably damned in the eyes of all good poets, or do you think that if I took it over & tried to make something of it I should get co-operation? Would you for instance send me some poems, & encourage the poets of Montreal to do so? And do you think it is worth my while to undertake the job at all? Would I do better to stick to my part in The Fiddlehead and my criticism?

Lectures start today, so I haven't time for a newsy letter. Mary is fine & very happy at the moment as she has had a painting accepted for the Maritime Art Exhibition--the first time she has entered. She thinks now she'll try the Montreal Spring Show & perhaps one or two others.

All the best,
Des Pacey
41. October 3, 1956

Dear Desmond,

Thanks very much for the booklet¹ and letter. I enjoyed both.

The Role of the Critic? In a nutshell, to create a favourable climate for works of originality or genius. It is a mistake to suppose as you do that the critic works on the creative writer. He doesn’t. He works on the public. If he’s sensitive and alert—knows his business—he’s quick to see what’s valuable and fresh. He explains, interprets, elucidates. But no critic, no matter how sensitive and alert, unless he also happens to be a fellow craftsman, can say anything that would be of the slightest use to a Blake or a Lawrence. Even should his insights be brilliantly apposite, they are irrelevant to the creator since the latter can learn only from his own experience, his own inner dynamics. I think it’s your failure to understand the nature of the creative process which makes you say that the role of the critic and the creator "are complementary and mutually advantageous." The true relationship between them is more like that of the dog and his fleas. The fleas need the dog, but does the dog really need the fleas? But we’ve been through all this before.

I also disagree with you when you say that the basic job of the literary critic in Canada is one of "clarifying the historical background."² Far more useful would be the critic who could read a poem with a first-rate artistic sensibility—and teach a horde of barbaric Canadians to do the same. In the hands of far-too-many critics the poem tends to dissolve into biography or various dogmatics of religion, metaphysics, etc. Almost no one today, excepting the poets themselves, reads a poem for the particular kind of experience which only it can give. In any case I have a deep-rooted dislike for scholarship: in the realm of poetry that is! In this wonderland the pedant is like an ape attempting to waltz or throw graceful kisses at his partner. By that I don’t of course mean I’m all for the New Criticism.³ This has produced its own aridities, because poetry is not technique but vision...

Don’t take on the job of editing Poetry! Not even you can remove the curse that’s fallen on it. You’ll be swamped with hundreds of mediocre poems and you’ll have to make some
selection from them. Out of friendship to you, I'd certainly keep sending you things, but I doubt whether you'd get anyone else hereabouts. Thirdly, Birney tried to make something livelier out of it than a CAA\(^4\) catch-all---and failed. I don't think it can be done.

Bet's just come back from sketching class and is hollerin' for me to come down to tea. Give my love and congrats to Mary. I'm going to write her very soon.

All the best,

Irving

PS "Obit" is just a jeu d'esprit. Bet helped me compose it.

Fun & games.

1"The Role of the Critic."

2Layton refers to Pacey's remark in "The Role of the Critic:"
I should welcome the application of the techniques of the New Criticism to the poetry of Lampman and Carman and Pratt, and the novels of Grove and Callaghan. But basically the job of the literary critic in Canada is still that pioneer task of clarifying the historical background, sorting out biographical and bibliographical details, seeking to arrive at preliminary evaluations and interpretations (25).

3Post-World War I school of literary critical theory insisting on close analytic reading of a text to reveal its intrinsic value as an independent unit of meaning; I.A. Richards (see 12.3) and William Empson (see 101.2) were early leaders, although the name was later taken from John Crowe Ransom's The New Criticism (1941).

4The Canadian Author's Association; see 4.4.

42.[pc] Sunday [October 8, 1956pm]

Dear Desmond,

Of course, besides explaining and interpreting, the critic also has the paramount task of evaluating. There's his real function, to sift the wheat from the chaff: to say what of a poet's or a novelist's work is valuable and significant and what is meretricous, immature and unlovely. Here all the resources of the critic come into play; his sensitivity, intelligence, scholarship, integrity. With all this, you doubtless would agree. In fact, you say something like that yourself in your article.\(^1\) You're in the right pulpit, but you must address your remarks to the sinners not to the saints, the creators. There's no point in reading them a sermon, because they're too intent upon their inner dialectic to pay much heed to something which, however excellent, they must feel is extraneous and an intrusion upon their voyage of self-discovery. I thought I'd add this note so that my earlier remarks might not strike you as too dogmatically harsh. Best regards to Mary.

Yrs,

Irv

\(^1\)Layton again refers to a Pacey remark in his Canadian Author and Bookman article (see 40.2):
For criticism, after all, is only the more or less intelligent and sensitive response of one human being to the artistic productions of another human being. The more intelligent, the more sensitive, the more careful, and the more honest the response, the better the criticism.... If he is to be of any value, he must be honest. If he thinks a book is bad, he must say so, even if it is written by his best friend or the literary hero of the century" (25).

43. [pc]  

October 18, 1956

S oh! S

Spender came to Montreal:
Grayhaired, distinguished, tall,
Offered his weary comment
On poets without talent
Wherever they could be found
Spain, Germany, England
Then read poems by Hardy, Owen
And some sad verse of his own
And sadder, sadder verses
By Cecil Day Lewis;
By Graves, and William Empson
Writing of wastes and poison
So he filled the cultured hour
With charm, but without power
While I wondered where were
The rebels of yesteryear?

Dear Desmond,
Some ddoggerel verses on Spender's visit here. The rebels of yesterday are the lecturers of today.⁴ (Scott's aphorism).⁵ O these weary, weary Englishmen! Motto for present-day poets: Neither a Lewis, nor a Spender be.⁶

Yrs,
Irv


⁴Scott is playing on "The rebels of yesterday are the reactionaries of today." often attributed to Clemenceau. (Mark Twain expresses the same idea: "The radical of one century is the conservative of the next." Notebook 1935).

⁵Scott made this remark to Layton after the lecture.

⁶Layton alludes to Shakespeare's "Neither a borrower, nor a lender be" in Hamlet (1.3.75).
October 22, 1956

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of October 3, & your various postcards. It is fun to get the poems hot from the griddle. How the hell do you find the time & energy to produce so much? I have always thought of myself as an energetic & productive person, but you put me to shame. I feel limp & listless when I think of your prodigious fervour.

Well, in your letter you blast me to hell again as a critic. You write as if I were the kind of supercilious critic who attempts to mask his own lack of creative power by looking down his nose at all who possess it. I admit that by definition a critic is inferior to a creator, but the inferiority is not that of a flea to his dog. It might be that of a seeing-eye dog to a racing greyhound! And I insist that a good critic is better than a bad creator. It worries me a bit to recall that bad poets like Wilson Macdonald\(^1\) have said all the things you say about critics. You always speak as if it went without question that you are on the plane of Blake & Lawrence—but suppose that you are really on the plane of Philip Jones Bailey (of "Festus" fame)\(^2\) or Wilson Macdonald. Lots of poets have felt that they were great creators—and posterity has doomed them to ridicule. Mind you, I don’t think you are a fraud, but I think you might have the humility to wonder occasionally & not be so ready to jump on me with both feet. I know you claim that the great artists have not been humble, but then the fakes have been even more arrogant. And I still maintain that a strain of humility does run through the great men. In fact I would go so far as to say that without humility no man can be truly great as an artist.

However this is threshing an old straw. Go on writing your poems & sending them to me. I like them. Spender of course has too much humility—he whines like a whipped cur, & always has.

I’ve had one of my few little triumphs as a creator. Du, a leading European magazine published in Zurich, has just published a German translation of my story "The Picnic" as the feature story in their October issue.\(^3\) It’s a beautiful magazine & I am very thrilled & honoured. It gives me hope to go on writing.

I finished my Pratt chapter in early October & have just finished the first draft of the Smith chapter.\(^4\) Klein, Birney & Scott still to write.

Mary is busily turning out paintings these days & is full of creative vitality. She’s almost as productive as you are.

I hope Betty is having a creative period too. Please give her my love. Hope we can get together again before too many months roll by.

As ever,

Des

---

\(^1\) Wilson Macdonald (1880-1967), Canadian patriotic and religious poet whose work remained nineteenth century in style; author of *Songs of the Prairie Land and Other Poems* (1918).
2Philip Jones Bailey (1816-1902), British poet remembered as the author of a single long poem--he was referred to as "Festus" Bailey--and as the father of the "Spasmodic" school of poetry; Festus (1839) was followed by over one hundred editions in which Bailey kept adding more bombast, including sections from his other unsuccessful poems.


4Chapters of Ten Canadian Poets.

45.[pc] Wednesday [October 24, 1956pm]

Dear Desmond,

My wife tells me there's a letter from you waiting for me when I get home to supper. Good news! I'm always pleased when I hear from you. Despite our differences—blown up by me to make an argument—I admire the gifts of character and talent that you bring to all your writing. If Canadian criticism ever comes of age, you shall have had no small share in bringing that result about. F.R. Scott told me Pennington¹ tore up the presentation copy of Music On A Kazoo. Hence the poem on the other side.

Yrs,
Ir

On Dick Pennington As A Fabled Character²

Mr P--I have heard it rumoured
That you, humanist, librarian with a license
In the shady privacy of your glassed room
Tore up my book of poems.

Sir, a word in your ear.
Others have tried that game; scorched immortal Heine
Mann and Feuchtwanger.
Barbarians! What deed could be vainer?

For this of yours (the ligatures
Pest-corroded) your eyes shall fall
From their sockets; drop on your lacquered desk
With the dull weight of pin-balls.

And the candid great
Of whom not one was an Australian
Cry dustily from their shelves
"Imposter! False Custodian!"
Till, a stunned derelict,
You fall down, blind, ear-beleaguered
while Rabelais—he pipes you to your death
On a kazoo quaint and silvered.

Irving Layton

¹Richard Pennington (b. 1904), University Librarian at McGill 1947-64, and author of several bibliographic works and the novel Peterley Harvest (1960). Despite Layton's remark in line
14, Pennington was English by birth, although he served as Head Librarian at the University of Queensland in Australia (1939-45) before joining McGill.


46[pc] Wednesday [October 24, 1956pm]
Dear Desmond,

Here's another written while waiting for a Parent-Teachers Meeting to get started. Congrats on the acceptance of your story. I am very pleased for you, and I hope it pours lubricating oil on your springs of resolution. As far as I know, you're the only Cndn critic who's also a creator. Please--I ain't Watson Kirkconnell; and don't you be taken in by my manner: when it comes to actual writing, I've oodles of humility. Wait till you read WCW on that side of me. All my love to Mary.

Yrs,
Irv

Anti-Romantic

You went behind a bush to piss.
Imagine Wordsworth telling this!
About Lucy? And Robert Bridges
About his dear lass?

The poets are such bad liars.
Damn them and their admirers.
The stars, the moon, for all their talk's stone--
Cunts, not always clean.

Yes, and they've solid interests
In mournful birds, in clouds, in mists
Did La Belle Dame Sans Merci a-shit?
Keats nowhere mentions it.

But read the Book of English verse
By whatchamacallit, and curse:
Second-rate thoughts, weakness, groans, laments
And soft sentiments.

You, love, fat, fat-assed pissed away
The odour was that of cut hay;
The flood came toward me with brown mirth
O waterfalling earth! O Light!

1See 44.3

2Watson Kirkconnell (1895-1977), scholar, translator and poet (The Tide of Life, 1930) and founder of the Canadian Author's Association (see 4:4).

3Layton refers to Williams' foreword to The Improved Binoculars:
As far as deftness in the craft of a poet, I think he can do anything he wants to—except confuse himself with the mere sound of his own wordings or delicate mincings or weighty soundings apostrophes. He is modest in facing the opinions of others—an enormous and increasingly rare virtue. Williams, "A Note on Layton," see 35.4.


Friday [October 26, 1956pm]

Dear Desmond,

Because the "genteel tradition" in this country has not been broken, and because culturally compared to some other countries we are very backward, the creator has a rough time of it. People with "know-how", the professors and critics have it all down the line. The Whalleys, Fryes, Woodcocks, and Carlyle Kings1 who couldn't write a poem to save their lives—or a short story either—have a prestige in this country that to me seems altogether out of proportion to their "creative" achievements and to a "gamin" like myself—quite absurd. So you see, I approach the problem from the opposite pole to yr own. What I feel is needed here is not more critics, etc, but poets who won't give two continental damns what the critics say about them, but will go on to say the truth that's in them with craftsmanship and exuberance. Only poets can produce more poets—here criticism is completely sterile. Wd you say the present ferment owes more to the critics or to the fact that some of us have gone on creating come hell or high water?

Yrs, 
Irv

1Carlyle King (1907-80), critic and longtime Professor of English at the University of Saskatchewan, Provincial President of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation (1945-60), and author of Saskatchewan Harvest (1955).

[c. late October, 1956]

Dear Desmond,

You wouldn't think from reading the poem on the other side that this was one of the joyfullest days I ever spent. But so it was. Canadian critics are too cut-and-dried, too opinionated—don't you be one of them. Accept the fact that creation is a mysterious dialectic, that only the poetasters can be lectured to: the good ones are too full of despair, surprise, ecstasy to attend to homilies however well intended. What they need is your abiding trust and affection, your charity and understanding. And for these they are, if they are anything like me, never ungrateful.

Yrs,
Irving
Black, Black¹

Black, black did I see today
As on the cold ground I lay:
The flowing dress of two nuns
At their mild devotions,
And a small, most savage dog
Harrving an age-felled log.

And the unceasing fall of
Leaves—ochre, vermillion, buff
That kissing the grass died
Their blackness intensified;
Till I thought the ebon gleam
Weakness that lets evil in:
My heart, stricken, sad, unfree,
And black, more black than all three.

Irving Layton

¹"Black, Black" The Improved Binoculars 2nd ed. 131.

October 29, [1956]

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your two postcards. The poem about pissing needs some more work—I don’t like that line about La Belle Dame with its weak rhythm & its ‘a-shit’—but what you say is true. Literature, & especially poetry, has neglected much of life. Of course Lawrence didn’t neglect it—he makes much the same point in Lady Chatterly’s Lover—"I wouldn’t want a woman who couldn’t shit."¹

You ticked Pennington off neatly. Did he really burn the book? It seems incredible.

Friday Nov. 2

Well, that’s as far as I got Monday when a lecture came up, & since then I’ve been up to the eyes in work.

In between lectures & committee meetings this week I’ve been writing my introduction to Dorothy Livesay’s Selected Poems. I’m not particularly proud of it, but I think it will serve the prime purpose of providing useful background information for an appreciation of her poetry. I think that the most notable thing about her is that she has been turning out poetry of good quality for over thirty years. Quite a contrast to Smith, for example, who wrote more poems during 1925-27 than he has ever written since. By the way, did you know that Smith said in 1928 "Nowhere is puritanism more disastrously prohibitive than among us, and it seems indeed that desperate methods & dangerous remedies must be resorted to, that our condition will not improve until we have been thoroughly shocked by the appearance in our midst of a work of art that is at once successful & obscene."²

Someday they’ll speak of Smith as your John the Baptist, n’est-ce pas?³
While I think of it, Mary told me to be sure & tell you to look at the cover of the current Maclean’s Magazine, which shows a poetess presenting a poem wrapped in pink ribbon to a reluctant editor. Mary thinks you should start wrapping your poems in pink ribbon, starting with the one about pissing behind a bush. My suggestion is that instead of ribbon you should use the crotch of a pair of silk panties.

Well, I’ve several more cards from you to answer. In one you talk about the genteel tradition in Canada & the exaggerated prestige of critics. I don’t think the phrase genteel tradition has very much relevance in a Canadian context. I feel that there’s only a tiny minority in this country that cares for literature at all, and that for good or ill it is concentrated in the universities. The university people are not "genteel" in any very significant way, and they are mainly left-wing politically (Carlyle King chairman of Sask C.C.F., Frye used to be a Marxist & is still well to the left, etc etc.). They are your allies--& the enemy is big business & philistinism generally. The odd exception such as Pennington shouldn’t blind you to the fact that most university librarians welcome frank books of all sorts (in our library, for example, your work is read & admired by all the librarians). You shouldn’t be wasting your satirical gifts on the Fryes & Paceys, or even on the relatively stuffy Woodcocks & Whalleys, but should be directing them against the politicians who are exploding hydrogen bombs & holding up the national health scheme & the Canada Council etc etc. We’re such a minority that we can’t afford intellectual civil war.

I don’t think we agree about the international situation. I don’t think Russia is sitting pretty as you suggest--I feel that Russia is in a very bad way, & that American capitalism is on the march. The Russians have washed their dirty linen in public & have made the grave error of debunking Stalin & they’ve lost enormously in power & prestige as a result. The Mindzentsky’s are the gainers. Of course I can’t see what on earth Britain & France are doing--they seem to have gone crazy. I think the situation is a revolutionary one, but I think it’s a counterrevolution & that we are in for a period of reaction like that in Europe after 1815.

However, I don’t fancy myself as an expert on international politics. I want to do something for Canada, for which there is still hope. If our writers, both creative and critical, can persuade us to be honest & self-critical & compassionate, we may be able to create something here which will survive the general collapse of values. God knows we’ve got a long way to go, but there’s something fundamentally innocent about most Canadians which presents hopeful material. We’re tainted with the brushes of British smugness & American commercialism to some degree, but it’s only a surface smear.
Well, I’ve rambled along until I’ve got myself bogged down in my usual sentimental cultural nationalism—I’m really just a naive idealist at heart—so I’d better gracefully sink into the quagmire wearing a pair of musky pink panties as I disappear.

Glug glug glug

As ever,
Des


3In the sense that John the Baptist foretold the coming of Christ.


5Canada participated in testing of hydrogen bombs 1956-57 until Prime Minister Diefenbaker announced suspension of atomic weapons tests early in 1958. The federal government’s National Health Program, introduced in 1948, was not fully implemented until the Hospital and Diagnosis Services Act of 1957 and the introduction of the Federal-Provincial Program on Hospital and Diagnostic Services in July 1958. On November 13 Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent announced several government decisions in the spheres of education and culture, including the creation of the Canada Council for the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, as recommended in the report of the Royal Commission chaired by Vincent Massey back in 1951.

6In a secret session of the Soviet Communist Party congress on 25 February 1956, Kruschev presented a lengthy report attacking the late Marshal Stalin’s abuse of his powers as party leader to execute or imprison his opponents, and his blunders in World War II strategy and agricultural planning; this new attitude was gradually revealed in speeches of Communist leaders who had attended the congress.

7Cardinal Mindszenty, the Roman Catholic Primate of Hungary, who had been under detention since 1948 was released in September of 1956.

8On October 28, Prime Minister Anthony Eden announced in the House of Commons that Egyptian-Israeli hostilities were jeopardizing free passage through the Suez Canal; therefore both sides should cease within twelve hours or British and French forces will intervene in whatever strength may be necessary to secure compliance. Egypt’s Nasser refused, adding that his nation was now "in a state of war" with Britain and France.
After the turmoil of the French Revolution and the Age of Napoleon, 1815-48 was a period of reaction in the history of Europe: governments sedulously avoided significant change domestically, and encouraged the international status quo through a series of congresses to discuss intervention against political unrest.

50. [pc] Tuesday [October 30, 1956pm]
Dear Desmond,

A pity—the useless, no, the unnecessary bloodshed in Hungary.¹ Had the Hungarians waited a couple [of] more days or weeks, they could have secured all they are now getting—and without the tragic waste in lives. What’s all the hypocritical rejoicing for in the Western press? Cannibals. Any open-eyed student of contemporary affairs can see for himself that the present leadership in Russia is anxious to delouse itself after Stalin’s baleful legacy. Look at Poland, Yugoslavia, at Russia itself. The evidence points increasingly to a continued liberalization—and in every field. To die for nothing, as I firmly believe the brave Magyars have done might be good melodrama, but it is not politics. When the smoke lifts and the stench of the brave corpses has been forgotten, you will find the Communist Gov’t of Nagy still in power, pre-war capitalism and landlordism irreparably smashed, and Hungary’s alliance with Russia unbroken...

To some points in yr letter: Because Einstein and a moron both say that the earth spins around the sun, in no way impugns the validity of the objective fact. It’s for the critic to distinguish the Blakes from the Kirkconnells.

Yrs,
Irv

¹During the last week of October, 1956, a nation-wide revolutionary movement against the Communist regime broke out in Hungary, leading to the formation of an all-party government by Imre Nagy. In response to overwhelming popular demands, Nagy announced that free elections would be held, that talks would be held to secure the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and that Hungary was leaving the Warsaw Pact and intended to adopt a policy of permanent neutrality.

51. [pc] Tuesday [October 30, 1956pm]
Dear Desmond,

Another postcard! My mind is a spawning ground for ideas. So much is happening in the world today, such wonderful stirrings from Hungary to Israel, to China—and all to the good. The future—and what a fine one it will be—is beginning to take shape, to define itself. Your "creative" critic would know what new thing was striving to be born, what new feelings, thoughts, hopes were required from us. As long as he confines himself to analysis and evaluation he runs on one leg. In this country, our educated classes, our writers, critics, reviewers etc live hopelessly out of touch with the zeitgeist.

Irv
Plain Words

In Communist Russia
there are no bosses
and no landlords.

In the USA
there are both.
There is also

Christianity (hokum)
No bird, No, but a
guided missile told me

The commissars
are coming
and los americanos

Are scared fartless.

NB Observe, please, I’m saying this when all the giddy fools are shouting about the imminent break-up of the Soviet Empire.

1See 48.1 (Hungary) and 47.7 (Israel). Layton’s reference to China may refer to the Eighth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party currently underway in China which proposed the collectivization of agriculture and the elimination of illiteracy.


52. [c October/November, 1956]
Dear Desmond,

Here’s something I just finished.1 Hope you like it. Finished two plays: "The Ambassadors" and "The Old and Quiet Ones".2 With my usual arrogance I say they’re damned good.

Yrs,
Irv

PS Best regards to Mary.

enclosure: ts "The Widows" with line inserted by hand.

1"The Widows," The Improved Binoculars 2nd ed. 112.


53. Thursday [November 1/8, 1956]
Dear Desmond,

For the first time since 1939, when England declared war on Nazi Germany, I find myself wholeheartedly supporting her in an international crisis: not only that, but taking sides with the Tories against Labour (not quite true--I went
along with her during the Korean episode). This is not, as you might suppose, because Israel has joined Britain and France in invading Egypt; simply that my poet's sense of reality (intuition?) loathes cant words, abstractions, "idols". I positively puke when people talk to me about "heroism" in the abstract. Or "sacrifice", "duty"—or other cant words. What's at issue is not "colonialism", "imperialism"—straw-stuffed shibboleths people bemuse their commonsense with, but the very concrete activities of a military adventurer who would like to pull on the vacated leather boots of the late Signor Mussolini. I'm exceedingly grateful that Eden and Mollet have learnt some lessons from recent history: there will be no Munich in the Middle East. Bravo! I say. Of course most of the blame can be put fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the present Am Administration that mistakes pieties for political realities and with a full paunch can afford to pass tempered and indeed, compassionate judgements on the struggle for existence which hungrier nations must daily and hourly wage.

Gawd, how I loathe idealists, poets, visionaries—when they have no guts! It sickens my stomach, puts vinegar and bile into it, when I see well-meaning humanitarians socialists, etc allowing their consciences to be scared by out-and-out murderers (the filthy scum which a collapsing social order today breeds all over the world in such vast numbers; would-be beggars on horseback) who have nothing but contempt for their scruples and merely use them as so much sand with which to blind our eyes. There is no other "justice" but historical progress; in the final analysis justice is technological. Backward nations should be helped—not for sentimental reasons, but in our own interest—by no means should they be permitted to destroy countries with a superior culture which would be the case if Egypt, a swamp of poverty, disease, and Mohammedan ignorance and superstition were let loose to crush a progressive democracy like Israel, or allowed to seize the Suez Canal to menace the very existence of enlightened countries like Gt Britain and France. Rather than see this happen, I'm prepared, if history allows us no other choice, to accept the reverse, the crushing of Egypt. Though everyone (dear, dear idealists in Am, Can, and SU!) is angry with Brit, France and Israel and all for putting them into the doghouse, I believe that future events will more than justify their course of action.

Excuse this political letter, I have no one to talk politics to here.

Yrs,
Irv

1Following Egypt's rejection of the Anglo-French ultimatum, British and French forces carried out an intensive air offensive followed by paratroop and commando landings in the Canal Zone on November 5. Israel had mobilized against Egypt on October 29; at the end of five days' fighting virtually the whole Sinai Peninsula was under Israeli control.
The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, when troops from communist North Korea invaded South Korea. The United States, Great Britain and their UN allies fought with South Korea; China along with the Soviets supplied the North Koreans. The Korean War ended on July 27, 1953.

President Abdel Nasser (1918—70), Egyptian Prime Minister (1954-55), and then President (56-70), had imposed martial law on Egypt and appointed himself Military Governor-General.

Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden and Premier Guy Mollet were the leaders of Britain and France respectively who had decided to present Egypt with an ultimatum at a meeting at Downing Street on October 30, 1956.

President Eisenhower's administration proposed a UN resolution on October 30 censuring Israel and demanding the immediate withdrawal of her forces behind established armistice lines; Britain and France vetoed the resolution.

Dear Desmond,

Bear with me—I'm in my political phase just now, and while I am I must talk politics all day long. Forgive me if these postcards bore you, but I must talk about recent happenings to someone, and Bet knows what I'm going to say before I open my mouth.

The morning newspapers say the Russians have re-entered Budapest. Well, that didn't take long! I wrote you in an earlier postcard that after the smoke had cleared, a communist govt' would remain in Hungary—for the sufficiently logical reason that the Soviet leaders are too realistic to permit any other. This will probably anger you, but I go on record as entirely approving this latest Russian move. They have the same healthy sense of reality which I currently approve in the British Tories and Israelis. The outlook for the peace of the world was never better, and I was never more sanguine about the future. What, let the old Horthy gang back into power! Not the Russians!

Yrs,
Irv

1Although the Soviet Union had ostensibly entered into negotiations with Nagy's government on the withdrawal of Soviet forces, it suddenly moved large reinforcements of infantry tanks and artillery into Hungary, and, without warning, at dawn on 4 November launched a concentrated attack on Budapest and other provincial centres held by the Hungarian patriots.

248 (October 30, 1956).

3Admiral Miklos Horthy (1868-1957), Regent of Hungary 1920-44, anti-communist criticized for his frequent concessions to Germany in the 1930's and 1940's; forced to abdicate and interned by the Germans in 1944, released by the allies in 1946.
Dear Des,

Though Eden has been pilloried by his Labourite opponents as a crazy madman and an imperialistic incendiary, history shall deal more kindly with him. I firmly believe he acted with exemplary courage to save the West from what would have been an irretrievable disaster. Now that an Int'l Police force has been set up by the UN, we can look forward to a real peace between Egypt and Israel. Also Eden's initiative has for good and all wrenched the Suez Canal from Nasser's hands, a matter every decent and sensible person should be grateful for.

What all this has done is to make me question my socialistic beliefs. Reluctantly, I've come to see that words like socialism, capitalism, imperialism, etc are 19th century inventions whose meanings are woefully inadequate to present-day realities. The force of science and technology have zoomed way beyond them: we need a new way of thinking and these words, particularly the first, have too many sticky and morally unwarrantable associations.

The blood that was shed in Hungary was not only useless: it put the clock back for who knows how long. The Russians have been put on their guard; concessions to liberalism and democracy will be slow in coming. I know it must sound callous to read these words—the brave Hungarians deserve a better epitaph! Certainly for one who for all his impatience with Hun futilitarianism would enjoy nothing better than seeing Kruschev & Co before a firing squad composed of Polish, Hungarian and Jewish poets.

Yrs,
Irv

1Eden's Middle East Policy was violently attacked by the Labour Opposition who tabled a motion of censure against the Government in the House of Commons on November 1.

2In the early hours of November 4 the UN General Assembly adopted a Canadian resolution to set up an Emergency International Police Force to supervise the cessation of hostilities.

3Gamal Abdel Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal on July 25, 1956; this action led to the hostilities referred to in the preceding note.

4Nikita Kruschev (1894-1971), First Secretary of the Communist Party, Marshal Nikolai Bulganin, Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Prime Minister), and other influential Soviet leaders.

Dear Desmond,

The QQ is before me: I've just finished your splendid review-article on the seven poets. My warmest congratulations go to you; you've done a superb job of seizing and sizing up what is the essence of each of us though, as will appear later, I have some reservations to make here and there. Your style here is irrefuteable:
just the right blend of informality and Bourbon, my term for critical rectitude. Your remarks on Webb, Cogswell went to the heart of their difficulties, and what you had to say abt Wilfred Watson, after the uncritical slush of Frye and others, will be applauded by every reader of poetry who can smell out for himself the difference between first-hand experience and a bookishly stale account of it. For that splendid piece of literary justice—your refusal to be intimidated by the big guns—you deserve a Frenchman’s hearty smack, not once, but several times over on each cheek.

On Layton, as always, you’re at your most cogent best. It’s as if you unbuttoned your vest and fly and completely at your ease you let go. I hope you appreciate the "sexual imagery" of that! After all the guff that Smith and now a new offender, Margaret Avison, have written about Wm C Wms’ and Pound’s influence on me, it’s enough to restore my faith in the intelligence of people when someone like you comes along and speaks of my affinity with Wm B Yeats. At last! I wrote Smith a long time ago that my favourites among the poets were Isaiah, Blake and Yeats, but he did nothing with that. Not that I haven’t read, and read appreciatively Wms & Pound—I’m not quite so innocent in a knowledge of their works as Ls D’s championship of me might imply—but major influence, or any influence beyond what has entered into the bloodstream of contemporary poetry, they most emphatically are not. When Wms’ correspondence is published all that will become quite clear—even to Smith. What you say about his being my John the Baptist is very funny. But the trouble with him is that he won’t summon up the courage his convictions require, nor let anyone else do so. Reading L D’s "Dirty Stuff", he labelled its author "the Rousseau of the water-closet", and he’s never been so enthusiastic about my "physical" poetry as you have. Of course he’s edited the Worldly Muse—that Pope of the pissoir!

But to drop this narcissism. I think you’ll come to see that your praise for both Wilkinson and L. Cohen was extravagant. A.W. gave her manuscript to L.D. and myself to look over when she was toying with the idea of having it published by Contact Press. We managed to clean up some of the poems—a line here, another there, that sort of thing—but we still left enough to give anyone the authentic feel of her emotional sloppiness. She’s like Webb in the limited aura of her experience, the hint and sometimes more than hint of hysteria; and like Souster in her being a "natural" who has no way of knowing when she has communed with the gods and when she’s falling flat on her iambics. Incidentally, I’m glad you gave Souster a break, he deserves it; what’s more you selected the right things to praise him for, here again going beyond the stuffy critics who have ever reviewed him. It’s good to see a critic saying kind things about a first book by a poet; here, it’s certainly a fault to underpraise than to overpraise. Still, you might have noted by way of correction the loose rhetoric (count
the "ands" and "butts" at the beginnings of lines) the influence of Lorca and the Spanish balladists, the absence of thought and the "swoosh endings", showing L.C.'s dependence on a steady downbeat, subtle variations in rhythm being then beyond him. His more recent poetry is much, much tighter.

Look here, may I make an immodest suggestion? Why don't you write an essay on Layton for inclusion in your book? I urge it upon you now because my Selected will be out in ten days, and if you don't someone else will beat you to the draw. Which wd be a pity as you've reviewed several of my books already, it wouldn't mean much therefore in the way of work for you. Also it wd bring the book you're writing up to date and give you an opportunity to extend your remarks in the QQ and elsewhere on the triumvirate of Dudek, Souster and myself. I don't know anyone now reviewing in Canada who cd do a fairer job than yourself of bringing our work, past and present, into some kind of intelligible focus. Besides, as I've observed before, a real sparkle comes into your eye when you write about me; you seem to get carried away by my imagined fornications, a chuckle seems to start at your toes and travel upwards until it reaches your lascivious lips where it breaks into the most satyr-like grin I could ever wish for on my own. Anyway, give it a thought. The remark about me that I particularly relished was the one where you say that I like people and things, even the people I dislike. That's a genuine epiphany. For that you may go to the head of your class! As you've begun to suspect, my bark is a whole lot worse than my bite, and I quarrel with people out of sheer exuberance. I'm like a young puppy in this respect, and nothing surprises me more than to find people turn on me with sudden anger because in my playfulness I've bitten into their shoulder.

My publisher, Jonathan Williams, is coming to Montreal the 17th of this month, bringing The Improved Binoculars with him. I'm planning a big "do" for both him and it. It would be great if you and Mary were here to launch the book and to share my happiness. But that's too much for a mortal to hope for or expect.

To come back to your book. Don't make it a White Savannahs. Make it a clean, hard-biting book, be like an autumn wind that scatters the highly-coloured but sick leaves, leaving only the few good things that any poet has written. Don't be afraid to use a scalpel. My love to Mary.

Yrs,
Irv

PS Of course you're way off base when you call "Mosquito" a trivial poem--no poem of mine is less! The imagery from the "bull's eye" on is suggestive of the eternal warfare in nature, with the best-laid schemes of man and mosquito going astray or being paid for by blood--yet the blood makes a "crooked star, faint" which one can decipher, though in the
meantime the mosquito’s shed blood is like "a red flag of protest, solemn and useless"... Also see how I play the motifs of white (purity & death) against the red blood. How cd you miss "a miniscule bomb", "bullseye", or the symbolism of the "white butterfly" hovering over the white table, battlefield of purity and death. Watch out for colour in my poems!

You tripped up on that one, but that’s because you despise my intellect and craft, while paying proper homage to my viscera. Voila! I have said it!

enclosure ts: "Cat Dying In Autumn"2

1 See 38.1.

2 Pacey’s remarks on Webb and Cogswell are ambivalent:

...I do feel that she [Phyllis Webb] has not yet decided just what it is that she must say. Much of her work gives me the feeling that it is the product of the desire, rather than the necessity to write poetry. It is significant that three of the best poems in the book— "Marvell’s Garden," "Poetry," and "In Dublin"— are about poets and poetry rather than about first-hand experience. Another indication is her proneness to lapse occasionally (see, for example, "Lament") into conventional complaints about the state of the world in the whining manner of Stephen Spender....
in The Haoleed Tree one has the feeling that he [Fred Cogswell] is trying on a series of masks to see how they suit him... Cogswell, in these particular poems at any rate, seems to get rutbound in recurrent rhymes and rhythms... Moreover, just as the single lines fail to add up to a whole greater than the parts, so do the poems fail to cohere into an overall pattern of meaning. Individually the poems are clever, true, perceptive; but collectively they reveal no single shaping personality. (436)

3 Pacey’s remarks on Watson are generally negative:

But whereas Cohen strikes us as an original poet, Watson, for all his brilliance, is a maker of pastiches. As we read through his book we find ourselves writing in the margin "cf Donne," "cf Yeats," "cf Auden," "cf Eliot," "cf Dylan Thomas," "cf Coleridge," cf Herrick," "cf Keats" or "cf Hopkins." This, in other words, is literary poetry, the product rather of reading than of living, and I cannot disguise my feeling that I therefore find it less compelling than that of all the other poets in this group. It is not my cup of tea: it is pretentious, self-consciously clever, pedantically erudite."(439)

4 See 22.2.

5 Margaret Avison (b. 1918), Canadian poet (Winter Sun 1960; The Dombbouncing 1966) and translator (The Plough and the Pen: Writings from Hungary 1930–1956 1963).

"In his laconic diction, his speech-rhythms, his singularity, Irving Layton is close to Souster—as both of them are to the American style of William Carlos Williams." Margaret Avison, "Poetry Chronicle," rev. of The Bull Calf et al, Tamarack Review 1: 78-84.

6 Pacey notes a similarity between the work of Yeats and that of Layton:

In that respect, the tone of these poems is akin to that of the later Yeats, and indeed it is of Yeats now that Layton most frequently reminds me: It is not the kind of literal reminiscence that one finds in Watson, but more of a spiritual
affinity, of a mellow mixture of illusion and disillusion which refuses to deny the fact that man is of the earth and there he must abide. (441)

7Dudek's article responds to Smith's review of Layton's work (see 5.37):
Our present method of criticism and our view of literary experience clearly involves some tragic misconceptions. Else how can Mr. Smith speak of William Carlos Williams as Mr. Layton's "Master"? Mr. Layton, until a year or two ago, had not read more than a few anthology pieces of Williams, and had no opinion at all of Williams' poetry; at present, with a library of some two thousand books, he does not own either volume of the Collected Poetry of Williams."


8Smith did not review Dudek's work; Layton thinks it likely that Smith made this comment to him in person.


10Layton compares Smith to Alexander Pope in his role as prolific anthologist and editor--i.e. Pope's Anthology of Neo-Latin poetry, Shakespeare's Works, Buckingham's Works--in response to Smith's comparing Dudek to the author of the revealing Confessions, Jean Jacques Rousseau.

11Pacey's review praises Anne Wilkinson's poetry:
I cannot remember another Canadian book of verse, unless it be A.J.M. Smith's classic News of the Phoenix, [sic: Phoenix] which has so impressed me with its absolute perfection of finish. Every word, every phrase, every stanza and every poem in this book gives one the impression of having been weighed, measured, trimmed, cleaned and polished until it has the flawless opacity of the lens which is one of Miss Wilkinson's favourite images. (437)

12Cohen's work is lauded for its musicality and sensuousness:
Cohen has a fine ear for the music of words, as we can see from the almost constant use in this poem ["Lament"] of assonance, alliteration and onomatopeia. He also has a keen sensual response to the natural environment. He is not merely a sensuous lyric poet, however--he is preoccupied with violence, particularly the sacrificial deaths of gods...All in all, Let Us Compare Mythologies is a brilliant beginning of what we hope may be a long and distinguished poetic career. (437)

13See 1.1; Anne Wilkinson's manuscript was published by Macmillan of Toronto in 1955.

14Pacey's review comments on Souster's poetry:
There is obviously much more art here than meets the eye...If Souster has not improved or changed, he has at least not declined...Indeed as these poems are read again and again one begins to see that there is more variety than one expected--that Souster can be gay as well as sad, clipped and epigrammatic as well as rambling and casual, angry and rebellious as well as wistful and resigned. There is something very appealing about his work--something genuine, honest, nakedly direct. I think he misses a lot of good things in life--he is quite blind, for example, to the virtues of Fredericton and of universities--but he sees things that the rest of us miss all the time. (438).

15Cohen's Let Us Compare Mythologies.
"In contrast with Watson, Layton is a life-affirming poet, who delights in people, even in those he dislikes." (441).


W.E. Collin, The White Savannahs (Toronto: Macmillan, 1936); the first book-length work on English Canadian literature from a critical standpoint.

Even his poorer poems—in this volume, for instance, "The Mosquito," which seems to me merely trivial—are provocative; and his best, such as the wonderfully tender "Bull Calf" which gives its name to this volume, are tremendously evocative and moving. (442)


57. November 9, [1956]

Dear Irving,

Your enthusiastic & tremendously cheering letter just arrived. I was sitting here at my desk poring over F.R. Scott’s poems1 & feeling rather depressed—but your letter was as good as a bottle of champagne.

I did feel myself that I had produced something quite good in the Queen’s review, & it is so nice to have you agree.

I have deeply considered the possibility of including you among my ten poets—you are infinitely better than Earle Birney for example—but I still think it would be better not. You see I want this book to sum up the past of Canadian poetry—all the poets will be either dead or over fifty. Then, in another book, I’ll tackle the really contemporary poets. Do you see my point? I want, for this book, to have perspective.

I won’t write a proper letter now, but I do want to pass on this—which is really my reason for writing. Did you notice on p.437 of the Queen’s review the misprint—News of the Poenix?! Isn’t that lovely? There’s the title for your next book if you’ve the courage to use it—News of the Penis!!

Mary’s love—she’s furiously painting these days.

All the best,

Des

1 Pacey was working on his F.R. Scott chapter of Ten Canadian Poets.

2 See 56.11.
Dear Desmond,

Yeats, Blake, and Isaiah—my favourites among the poets, but not exclusively. And not, excepting Isaiah, for me the greatest of all poets, always. Yeats began as a romantic phoney, whose mind and attitudes had I been alive then and known him, I should have heartily despised. And even towards the end something of the literary charlatan clung to him: his despairs and elations never quite convince one, being displayed as they are under a glass just a trifle too well polished for honest emotion. Blake’s longer poems are a mess—volcanic slags testifying to terrific energy but ugly and unusable. The real truth is that my Yiddish temperament (idealistic, ironic) and the Yiddish idiom have been a much greater shaping influence on my writing than any author I’ve ever read. That’s what my letter in this CF was designed to remind people. But will the critics, intent on literary genealogies, take the hint?

Yrs,
Irving


Dear Desmond,

I see your point and agree with you perfectly. What is wanted in the kind of bk you’re writing is perspective. All the poets you deal with have done their work, have shot their bolt, and you now have the challenging task of evaluating what it is they have done. Here’s, of course, where the critic comes in. May I give you my impressions of some of them?

Scott—a thin, reedy voice, a socialistic Matthew Arnold, a picker-up of other men’s styles, a clever adapter—his books are a convenient handbook of modern versification. His only real subject matter is a distaste for capitalism and living. Eight-ninths of his work is mere junk, but the remaining ninth has a quiet intensity that carries conviction. No imagination, no exuberance, no vision—perhaps the most over-rated poet in the country.

Birney: lacks Klein’s verbal cleverness (mistaken by critics in Canada for imaginative vision) but is like him, not really a poet, but an able journalist in verse. Has no empathy, no verbal magic, no subject matter, no imagination, no intensity. Like F.R.S another vastly over-rated figure.

Yrs,
Ig
Tuesday afternoon [November 13, 1956pm]

Dear Desmond,

To continue with my unasked-for impressions.

Scott’s place is made secure by a handful of lyrics and his satirical verse, the latter a welcome novelty in this for-God-and-Queen etc country. I’m doubtful, however, whether his satires have more than a contemporary interest—they’re topical now and will probably have some slight historical value for future generations.

As for A.M.K—observe how his best poems are Wordsworthian recollections in tranquility. He’s at his best when he’s remembering his past or contemplating failure. Consider the progressive distillation: Jew, French-Canadian, Indian, Poet. Each time the group grows smaller and smaller, and the unsuccess more poignant. Read The Second Scroll, where the hero returns to the orthodox faith of his fathers, and this in modern Israel which has today a higher percentage of atheists and unbelievers than any other place in the world. The truth of the matter is that Klein, disliking the modern world and fearing it, withdrew from it in proud and bitter isolation. I know this view seems contrary to what you and other critics have written about him (his "bonhomie", etc—stuff and nonsense!) but I ask you to examine his poetry carefully. Do not mistake verbal cleverness for poetic imagination. There’s more real poetry in a wayward pussyhair of Jay Macpherson than in Birney, Klein and Scott put together.

Irv

1. Layton is referring to the Jewish poems which make up the bulk of Klein’s first and third volumes (Hath Not a Jew (1940), and Poems (1944), the poems on French-Canadian life and culture which make up the bulk of his fourth and final collection, The Rocking Chair and Other Poems (1948), "Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga," the ninth poem in that collection (11), and "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," (50-56), the final poem in the volume.


Wednesday [November 14, 1956pm]

Dear Desmond,

Smith’s passion is more for literature than life. How very little of the real turmoil of the world he has gotten into his verse! Have you noticed the almost complete absence of confusion in the verse of that generation? Smith, Klein, Scott, Birney, Pratt, each of them had his own tower with a protective moat around it. Smith’s classicism, Klein’s Zionism, Scott’s socialism, Birney had himself, the bleakness of that diluted with a vague humanitarianism, Pratt his monsters. But there’s one trouble with moats (imagine Pratt’s monsters swimming about in a moat!), it keeps life away from your doors. Note too how little of
themselves they get into their verse—for me that’s the giveaway, the fatal clue. The poet’s gift to the world is himself, though he may wrap that self up in all kinds of different vestments. The exception is Klein; nevertheless the "I" in Klein is the hurt boy whose faith (Jewish Orthodoxy) was taken away from him. It’s precisely because there is an "I" in Klein, however windy, feeble and romantic he is, that puts him slightly ahead of Scott, Birney, and Smith.

Remember, I cut my poetic teeth on these men.

Irv

62.    Thursday [November 15, 1956]¹
Dear Desmond,

You may be interested in a note which I am sending to F.R. Scott.² It goes as follows:

My dear Frank:

I am enclosing today’s editorial in the NY Times which sums up the Middle East situation with commendable clarity and vigour.³ Ten days ago they were as frazzled and befuddled as you were. Now they’ve seen the light. Good! Let’s not waste time and precious energy on useless recriminations. It ought to be clear at this moment even to Socialists that the Russians made a bold gamble and almost succeeded. They were stopped dead in their tracks by the Israelis and the stouthearted Tories. The play is not over, but at least we have been given a short breathing space.

I write you this, as I’ve written to Burton Keirstead⁴ to get you to think freshly and courageously about matters which I and many others of your admirers feel deeply. What’s wanted these days is not glibness, the evasive witticism, but hard thinking, the realization that socialism can be a pretty conventional screw. People with some degree of influence owe it to themselves and their followers to re-examine their premises. That may be painful but time and your conscience allow you no other choice.

Ever,

IL

¹This undated, unstamped card was dated by reference to Layton’s letter to F.R. Scott in the Scott papers at the National Archives.

²Irving Layton, letter to F.R. Scott, 15 Nov. 1956, F.R. Scott Papers, National Archives of Canada.


⁴Burton Keirstead (1907-87), economist, journalist and educator, Professor of Economics at the University of New Brunswick 1931-42, McGill University (42-53), and the University of Toronto (1953-77); author of Essentials of Price Theory (1942) and The Theory of Economic Change (1949).
Dear Desmond,

Phyllis Webb agrees with me that your review-article in the QQ is one of your best efforts. I saw her yesterday; Scott dropped in—you know her apartment is close to the university—and we had a lively time discussing the situation in the Suez. F.R.S was unrepentant, but not quite as cocky as he was a week ago, now that the wisdom of Eden's move is apparent to everyone. Of course I've teased him unmercifully, telling him that both his politics and his poetry are lacking in intuition. And when I do that, Phyllis speaks up for him, calls me an insensitive boor, and becomes quite cross with me until I kiss her on her forehead, say that my nasty postcards are simply misunderstood poems, and vow to reform. Then the three of us finished the bottle of sherry and made plans for the coming of Jonathan Williams and the big party we're putting on next Saturday for him and TIBBY. What a pity you don't live in Montreal! The group has been augmented by the coming of Al Purdy, who's been writing furiously since his arrival. He's got a voice-box, and he's been taping everyone he can get to perform before it. So far he's gotten Phyllis, and me, always willing to project. I did a full hour recording for him. He promised to bring the tape for next week's party.

Yesterday I read some poems for the CBC--seven in all. "The Widows" and "Cat Dying in Autumn" are among them. Anthology will put it on in a month or so. CBC still has the two plays Ls and I wrote; maybe something will come of them. Currently I'm working on a review of St John Ervine's biography of GBS and a longish short story. If the latter is any good I'll send it off to you. Ervine's biography of Shaw though the best one yet, and probably the definitive one, is not quite satisfactory. I'm beginning to think that a satisfactory life of Shaw will never be written by anyone. The man himself is an enigma—how reconcile his iconoclasm with his obvious relish in the dictators; or his acknowledged kindness of heart with his refusal at any time to condemn the well-known atrocities perpetrated in Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany? Ervine doesn't even see that there's a problem here that asks for solving—he merely states the facts and lets it go at that. There are other puzzles. Shaw's worship of the strong man—why? His enjoyment of pugilism. Anyway I'm going to make a stab at solving them. If CBC takes it, you might hear that on Anthology too one evening. Don't be embarrassed about not answering my postcards. I enjoy writing to you. It keeps me sane.

Ever,
Irving

1Scott was Professor of Law at McGill University from 1928 until his retirement in 1968.
2 On November 9, David Ben-Gurion, Prime Minister of Israel, announced that Israel was ready to withdraw her forces from the Sinai Peninsula after the entry of an international force into the Suez Canal area.

3 The Improved Binoculars.


6 The Ambassadors and "A Man Was Killed;" see 52.2.

7 Layton did not publish a review of this book.


64. November 19, 1956

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your postcards and Friday’s letter. Disappointed that you don’t seem to have appreciated my joke about News of the Penis.

Which reminds me of a good joke I heard over the weekend. Seems a young bull & an old bull were standing on a hilltop when a herd of cows came into view in the valley below. "Let’s run down & fuck one of those cows," said the young bull excitedly. "Let’s walk down and fuck ’em all," said the old bull calmly!

Hope your big party was a great success. Wish Mary & I could have been there.

I’ve had a lot of good news lately, so much so that I am almost frightened of hubris. Pierce wrote to say that my Livesay introduction was the best single thing I had ever done, magnificent, perceptive & debonair etc etc.1 Then Livesay herself wrote to the same effect.2 Then Pratt wrote3 to say my chapter on him is "a superb bit of analysis" which corrects many of Sutherland’s errors.4 Then my agent wrote from London5 to say my "Picnic" story has been sold to two other European magazines,6 and that "The Boat" has been sold in Switzerland & Germany!7

Let me know when you are on Anthology. Our station carries the programme now, & I’ll be sure to listen.

Mary sends her love. She’s still painting like a fiend.

As ever,
Des Pacey

1 Lorne Pierce, letter to Desmond Pacey, 9 Nov. 1956, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.
65. [pc] Monday [November 19, 1956pm]
Dear Desmond,
Because I haven’t listed the virtues of Scott, Klein, Birney, Smith and Pratt doesn’t signify I don’t know them or that they haven’t got any. But I feel that those are well enough known: the polish of Smith, the vigour of Klein, etc. And when I say that 8/9 of somebody’s work is junk, I’m only saying something which I feel is true of the output of most poets, myself included! I think that any poet says what he has to say in 9 or 10 poems: the rest is commentary, good to have around, but not indispensable. As I grow older I find fewer and fewer poems delight me—that goes for Yeats, Eliot et al. I think the perceptive critic seizes what is truly original and distinctive in the poet he happens to be dealing with and makes his estimate on that. Here he discovers the strengths and weaknesses, the scope of imagination, the passion. If you write a tight book (that doesn’t preclude ease or gayety as your QQ review-article shows) that sums up the virtues and shortcomings of that generation you’ll have written the definitive essay on them. But, of course, you don’t need my telling you that.

Irv

66. [pc] Friday [November 23, 1956pm]
Dear Desmond,
Your suggestion that I use News of the Phoenix as a title for my next book gets me. Of course, I’ll have to ask Smith’s permission, and he may very well want it for one of his own. Well, let him have it.
Which reminds me that there are two errors in my own book, The Improved Binoculars. Two, anyways, that I’ve noticed so far.
In "Cemetery in August"—the first line should have white butterflies, not while. And in "Earth Goddess", the line "For the smelly puritan" was left out.1 Spoils the rhythm hopelessly.

Jonathan Williams couldn’t stay for the party which I’m having tomorrow night but left yesterday for Boston. He’s a wonderful man, the sort that restores one’s faith in mankind. A dedicated soul, unassuming, quiet-spoken. I arranged a reading for him at McGill and McCormack2 said they’d get him to do a tape for them. He’s practically promised to pay us another visit next fall. Since he’s setting out on a cross-country bookselling campaign (US) he says he’s going to bring out another edition of TiBBY this coming February. He wants me to include another dozen poems, or so. Any suggestions? Love to Mary.

Yrs,
Irv

1These errors were corrected in the second edition published (with thirty additional poems) in February, 1957.

2Robert ("Bob") McCormack (b. 1923), CBC radio and television producer based in Montreal.

67. November 26 [1956]
Dear Irving,

Thanks a lot for your new book. Mary and I have both been enjoying it. It is a remarkably good photograph of you on the cover, and the poems inside read as well as ever. It deserves a wide sale & good reviews, & I hope it gets both here & abroad.

By the way, your books are almost constantly on loan from my office. Students & professors alike are forever taking them off to read, & you therefore have a good reputation here. Even some of the most apparently prudish spinsters in the faculty read your work with undisguised delight. I hope they’ll be moved to buy some of your books themselves.

I have your postcard of Friday in front of me. Glad you liked News of the Penis as a title. The companion volume would of course have to be News of the Vagina. Then the third could simply be called Union.

Do you have any idea what turned F.R. Scott in the twenties away from his father’s ideas to (a) modernist verse and (b) socialist ideas? I wrote to ask him, but he’s never replied. I’d like to be able to speak of the change with some knowledge of what precipitated it. Was it meeting Smith at McGill, or had the change begun at Bishop’s or at Oxford?2

Most of your observations on the poets accord with my own, but I’m trying to accumulate all the relevant facts so as to produce a definitive account of their development. For instance I’m wading through all of Scott’s prose as well as his poetry, looking for germinal ideas & attitudes. It’s
a slow & often discouraging job, but I’m heartened by the response to the chapters I have done. Pierce says "your book is going to be a humdinger, and that is my accolade as I have not said that about any book for years." Well, to keep it up is going to take a hell of a lot of work. Since I haven’t brilliance of mind, I have to try to compensate by hard, honest, grinding thought.

How did you like my two bulls? More & more I feel that we in this age need gaiety. When Housman said "The feather pate of folly/ Bears the falling sky," he said a mouthful. How could one keep sane in this terrible time of tension if it were not for laughter? So if you hear any good jokes, pass them along.

All the best,
Des P

PS Have you seen New Voices (the student anthology) & Writing in Canada? DP

1 Scott’s father, the Reverend Frederick George Scott (1861-1944), was a poet and the rector of Saint Matthew’s Anglican Church in Quebec City.

2 Scott attended Bishop’s 1916-19 (BA), and Oxford 1920-23 (B Litt); he met Smith when he returned to Montreal to study Law at McGill 1924-27; they founded the McGill Fortnightly Review in 1925.

3 "And the feather pale of folly
Bears the falling sky."


5 See 2.7.

Wednesday [November 28, 1956pm]
Dear Desmond,

I’m very pleased that you and Mary like the book. I also think Jonathan Williams did a rare job this time, spurred on, I dare say, as much by W.C. Wms’ foreword as by the poems themselves. This edition shd go fairly quickly, and another is talked about for February. I’m adding 25 poems,1 including "The Widows" and "Anti—Romantic". Also, because I like yourself believe in gayety, "Marie" from The LPS2 and "Admonition & Reply" from the BP.3

Scott’s awakening came from his meeting up with A.J.M. Smith at McGill. I’ve had this from his own lips. Before then he was a good, moral upright Anglican, very genteel and having the proper notions on life and conduct. It was Smith who knocked his respectable Anglicanism into a cocked hat; it was Smith who showed him modern poetry...Your book ought to [be] the definitive study of that generation. The
summing-up. Congrats on your stories. Bet’s doing some etching. Good work too. All my best to Mary.

Yrs,
Irv

1Eventually thirty additional poems were added.

2The Long Pea-Shooter 47.

3The Blue Propellor np.

Monday [December 3, 1956pm]

Dear Pacey:
You asked me where F.R.S. picked up his Socialism. I think he picked it up at McGill. Probably from Eugene Forsey1 who was lecturing in political science at the time, or from David Lewis,2 who was then an undergraduate. He couldn’t have got that from A.J.M. Smith.

Though it’s been the fashion to deride Scott’s socialism, I think myself his interest in economic and political questions gave a certain toughness to his verse which it might otherwise have lacked. Moreover, it created one of the tensions that provided an unfolding dynamic. By temperament he’s an individualist; you might say by training, he’s that also. In his economic and political creed, however, he’s a collectivist. In his "Lakeshore" poem,3 note the "aloneness", the "single salvation" of the collectivist. There are sexual tensions in that poem, too. For these reasons, it’s maybe the best poem he’s written—certainly one of the most moving.

I’m damned sorry and damned depressed that the Bull Calf dedication was again left out. Without my knowledge all dedications were omitted.

Yrs,
Irv


2David Lewis (1909-81), socialist politician, labour lawyer, a key theorist for the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation in the 1930s and 1940s and key architect in the formation of its successor, the New Democratic Party in 1961, which he led from 1971-75.


Tuesday [December 4, 1956pm]

Dear Pacey,
I hope you’ve got a TV set. This coming Sunday I’ll be on Fighting Words1 and the Sunday after on Citizen’s Forum.2 I’ll wave to you and Mary.
A young flapper married a senile octogenarian for the usual reason--his money. Still, before kicking off and leaving her his insurance he insisted on making love to her. Only each time he tried he shat instead of having an orgasm. Shat right on her face. This went on for several nights. Then one night, though the old fellow tried hard enough, nothing came. He only farted. The flapper turned to him appealingly and said: "What's the matter, pooppee, don't you love me anymore?"

Yours, for gayety,
Irving

1Fighting Words, CBC Television, 9 Dec. 1956. (Moderator Nathan Cohen; panelists Morley Callaghan, Irving Layton, Ted Allan and Douglas Grant; producer Cliff Solway.)


December 6, 1956

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your latest three postcards--although I'd prefer to be addressed as Des rather than Pacey, which always reminds me of the snobbery and sadism of my English school!1

Was reading over some of your poems this morning at breakfast and was again struck by their power and inevitability. You really write with authority now, with that sonorous finality that Yeats attained in his later work. By the way, talking of gaiety, Yeats of course has it exactly--"And gaiety transforming all that dread"2; "Wisdom is a butterfly and not a gloomy bird of prey"3; "Bitter and gay--that is the heroic mood."4 But some of your lines are equally as memorable--e.g. "A quiet madman always near to tears"5.

Of course all this is relevant to Scott also--who of course more or less preoccupies my attention these days. If it weren't for his gaiety, in the satires especially, he'd be nowhere (that's exaggerating, but not much). Thanks for your leads on him, although he has now written me several letters himself & has told me a great deal about his early life & influences. At the moment I have my notes pretty well assembled to write his chapter, but am putting off writing out of fear. Do you have that fear of starting? Once underway I live in glory--but the setting forth is timid and afraid, apprehensive that the words won't flow nor the ideas formulate.

It will be Klein next. What can you tell me about him? Is he sufficiently recovered6 that I could expect him to write & give me some facts about his early life? Is he back at work? Should I refer to his nervous breakdown in my chapter? What's become of that Joyce study he was writing?7 Has he stopped writing poetry for good? What conflict broke him down?
Don't worry about the dedication. I'm not worrying about it.

Did you hear the Roberts' broadcast last night? I didn't like parts of it—Iloyd made too much of his own role, & there were cobs of corn scattered around—but on the whole it was a pleasant experience. He had the honesty to admit some of the more seamy & sordid facts about the Roberts clan.

Yes, we shall certainly be watching for you on Fighting Words & CF. Our programmes are delayed a week (pending the coaxial cable linking us to Montreal, due 1957) so don't expect to hear from us until a week after the programme is filmed.

Mary & I enjoyed your joke about the centenarian & his bride. I do have a bit of a block about excremental jokes—a lingering streak of nursery inhibition I suppose—but I found this one funny nevertheless.

Had a nice letter the other day from George Walton in Regina. He wrote to express his admiration for my QQ review article, but also mentioned meeting you & said how much he liked you. Said he was struck by your goodness & gentleness—which of course pleased Mary as that's what she sees in you. I of course see through that virtuous mask to the beast within and see the dog beneath the skin! All the best,

Des Pacey

1 From 1928-1931 Pacey attended Magnus Grammar School in Newark, Nottinghamshire.


3 Yeats, "Tom Oroughley," Variorum 337-8 (line 7).


6 See 60.3.

7 Klein's page-by-page commentary on Joyce's Ulysses was never completed, but three sections were published as articles: "The Oxen of the Sun," (Here and Now, Jan. 1949), "The Black Panther: A Study in Technique," (Accent, Spring 1950), and "A Shout in the Street," (New Directions in Prose and Poetry 13, 1951).

8 Layton's planned dedication of the poem "The Bull Calf" to Pacey (see 14) which did not appear.


10 Lloyd Roberts (1884-1966), poet (England Overseas 1914) and news correspondent, eldest son of Charles G.D. Roberts, author of The Book of Roberts (1923).
The final link in the co-axial microwave system—linking Quebec City with Saint John—thereby joining the Maritime regional network with the central network was opened on 2 February, 1957.

George Walton (b ), Professor of English at the University of Saskatchewan.


Dear Desmond,

Here I am back from Fighting Words, still alive, still kicking. The most profitable part for me was the plane journey there and back, and what I managed to see of Toronto. Saturday evening crowds in Toronto are much gayer, I found, and more uninhibited, as well as friendlier than those I have seen in my own beloved city. This is a hard confession for me to make, who have a number of poems most disparaging to Toronto.¹ I wonder if it was Souster’s poems about the place² which misled me—art is a most insidious form of propaganda—but it always seemed to me that the metropolis was grey and bleak and unappetizing. Right now, I can’t recall a single poem of Souster’s in which the light and colour and vitality which I saw last Saturday night leaps up before me in the magical and persuasive recreation of poetry. But we see what we want to see, and it is precisely the poet’s gift of universalizing the subjective which makes him at times so misleading and dangerous.

It took me some time before I got my bearings on Fighting Words. Before I knew it, I felt three firecrackers were exploding all about me, and the swish of words crossed and recrossed before and behind me, but I said to myself, "I had better get into this act, I am getting paid to perform, not to keep silent and look wise", and get in I did, to the best of my fighting and pugnacious ability. Of course, we ingloriously got nowhere. Any one of these quotations would have been sufficient for a half-hour program; besides, the first and the last quotation were obviously chosen by the MC to start a scrap between Morley³ and myself.⁴ Well, we didn’t disappoint him, nor the audience either, judging from the phone calls that came in directly after the broadcast.

Every writer knows the feeling that you speak of: the paralysis, or simply the fright, that seizes one before beginning an opus. As you probably know, there is no other remedy but to plunge into the icy current, removing one’s fears and hesitations as one does one’s undergarments and shoes. Your chapter on Scott ought to be a very good one. There is lots of material on him, and there are several interesting aspects of his personality and writings that beg for investigation and analysis. There’s a buried inner life
in Scott which needs to be unearthed and brought to the
surface. His lyrics will give you the nuggets that you are
looking for. His love poems are among the saddest that I
have ever read, telling of abnegation and restraint and
withdrawal: no gaiety here, no release. I always get the
feeling on reading them of a man battling against invisible
currents, family ghosts, the diffidence engendered by
memories and frustrated desires. Certainly there is a story
here which the skillful detective-critic should go after.

I can’t write about Klein without appearing crude and
unfeeling. He was my first mentor in poetry, and it was to
him that I brought my first tentative short stories. For a
period of seven or eight years I used to see him once and
sometimes twice a week for a cup of coffee and a chat. The
talk, as you might expect, was mainly about poets and
poetry. He was always witty, sometimes brilliant, and,
before his nervous breakdown, gay and good-humoured. But
Klein’s story is a tragic one of Coriolan’s pride and
failure. Unfortunately, he possessed gifts which are of no
value in the commercial society in which we all nowadays
live. There is nothing that Klein would have liked to have
done more than to use those gifts. Instead, he was
compelled to earn his daily bread in a profession which he
despised, and to see men less brilliant than himself gain
honours and wealth which that society only too readily
confers upon the unscrupulous, the superficial, and the
aggressive. In time, I believe that broke his spirit; it
made him a deeply discontented person, his intellectual
pride serving to aggravate the wound and keep it running
with pus. I said that I could not write anything about him
without appearing unfeeling and crude, but you asked me for
the truth and I will give it to you as I see it. Therefore,
add to what I have already told you his marriage to a woman
so enormously stout that beside her he appears a poor, thin
wraith, (remember that he is a poet, with a poet’s love of
feminine beauty: read his early love poems to the woman who
afterwards became his wife). I may have told you when you
were here that during his crisis he attempted to do violence
to his wife—not an insignificant fact. Add also that, like
every other poet, there is a strong, wayward, bohemian
streak inside him, the strong desire to kick over the
traces, all this conflicting with an equally strong Hebraic
sense of responsibility and family ties. I can still see in
my mind how his lips would curl up when discussing the
backslidings of his fellow poets. It was the only time that
I found him disagreeably malicious. For the homosexual, the
failure, the man who had turned his back on family
obligations, he had scant sympathy. Here, the repressed
bourgeois was clearly revealed. To one like myself, that
side of him, if not incomprehensible, was certainly
distasteful. As our relationship matured, I realized two
things about him. First, as is not infrequent among
intellectuals, that his mental development had far
outstripped his emotional one; and secondly, that of all the
poets I have ever met no one had less insight, or even interest in human beings than he did. He is unusually deficient in a sense of character; sentimentality does work for sympathy; wit for wisdom. He is a frightened child in a fedora; the boy who was never good at games compensating for his awkwardness at baseball and hockey by an ostentatious vocabulary and erudition. He is touchy, suspicious, irritable, narcissistic--qualities, alas, so frequently found in the unfortunate tribe of poets, but in him, raised to an astonishing degree by his sense of failure.

Make sure that you read his Jewish poems carefully; that you understand their specific background, even if you have to read several volumes on Jewish history and folklore. Here's where the discerning critic can do a particularly original piece of work. While Klein has abandoned his Jewish orthodoxy intellectually, emotionally he is still very much within its grip. It always used to make me uneasy when he would begin discoursing on God. Of course, no Jew can talk about God without making the listener feel as though He were a member of the family. For the Jew, God is no gaseous abstraction, but veritably the Old Man with the flowing beard. Only, I used to feel that Klein often took liberties with that beard, permitting himself, since his motives were so impeccable, a jovial tug to make the Old Man bend down to listen to his lisping pronouncements. In the Second Scroll, Klein has his hero return to the orthodox faith, with all its grim ritual and superstition, after his wayward flirtations with Bolshevism and Catholicism.

The conflicts, as you see, are many: poet versus bourgeois pater familias; brilliant scholar versus necessitous shyster; orthodox Jew versus modernist intellectual; the apparently good humoured, accepting, vivacious, etc etc individual versus the morose, introverted, discontented, mistrustful, overweeningly proud inner Coriolanus, suffering from a sense of undeserved neglect and poverty. What rich material there was here for poetry! The failure of Klein is the failure of a man too frightened by his environment, by fate, if you will, to be the moving poet that the charitable fairies attending his birth intended him to be when they placed those lavish gifts of intellect, imagination and impulse in his unpropitious cradle.

I shall write you more in my next letters to you, but I hope I have given you some material that you will find of value in your chapter on Klein.

Thank Mary for her kind observations on my own character. To be good and gentle is my greatest wish, but virtue, like art, is hard to come by, and life is brief.

Yours as ever,
Irving Layton
(per Mee)8

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Raymond Souster's poetry deals with his native urban environment (Toronto) in a realistic style, hence a majority of the poems in his first eight volumes (to 1956) might be termed "anti-Toronto."

Morley Callaghan (b. 1903), Canadian novelist (Strange Fugitive 1928, The Loved and the Lost 1951), and short story writer (A Native Argosy 1929).

Quotations discussed on the December 9 Fighting Words included: 1) D.H. Lawrence's statement that, "Being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher and the poet"; 2) Claude Bissell's comment "Canadian literature suffers from the failure of our critics to make necessary distinctions between the good, the average and the bad"; and, 3) Morley Callaghan's remarks that "The opinion that Montreal has a dazzling intellectual life is a myth".

A reference to the aristocratic hero of Shakespeare's Coriolanus.


Layton here refers to the majority of the poems in Klein's volumes Hath Not a Jew (such as "Design for a Medieval Tapestry," "Reb Levi Yitshok Talks to God," and "Sonnets Semitic," and Poems (such as "The Psalter of Avram Haktani," "A Voice Was Heard in Ramah," and "Yehuda Halevi, His Pilgrimage.")

Typist's initials; see 74.

Thursday [December 13, 1956pm]

Dear Desmond,

You might ask A.M. Klein to let you see his privately bound books of verse: they contain the poems that he wrote his wife when he was courting her. I very much doubt, however, whether he'll let you have them. They're valueless as poetry—lush, romantic, facilely-clever stuff—but the later Klein's prefigured in them.

I don't think he's writing poetry, nor do I think he's ever going to write poetry again. There's nothing to spur him on in writing it, in fact, he rose from the ashes 15 years ago to trill his best song only because he met up with Preview and First Statement. Klein is inordinately vain, even for a poet, and praise, recognition, approval, etc, are the needed adrenalin shots. What is the real lament in his "Portrait of a Poet" but that the poet lives and dies in obscurity? His final tragedy, is that with all his great gifts, he lacked faith in his vocation; lacked courage to affirm the poet against the bourgeois and the philistine. If ever an eagle was laid on his back and properly trussed by family, religion, society, it was he.

Yrs,
Irv
1Hath Not a Jew (New York: Behrman's Jewish Book House, 1940) and Poems (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1944).

2Klein associated with the poets in both of the "rival" Montreal literary magazines First Statement and Preview, and contributed to both periodicals, although his involvement with each group was marginal.

3Section I of Klein's "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" (see 60.1) begins:
   Not an editorial-writer, bereaved with bartlett,
   mourns him, the shelved Lycidas.
   No actress squeezes a glycerine tear for him.
   The radio broadcast lets his passing pass.
   Section II responds with the opening "The truth is he's not dead, but only ignored."

74.[ts]
Irving Layton Esq
8035 Kildare Avenue
Côte St Luc, PQ

December 20, 1956

Dear Irving,

Thank you very much for your long and most interesting letter about Klein, and the subsequent postcard on the same subject. Obviously I shall not be able to print a good deal of this information, but it is most valuable background information to have.

We saw you on Fighting Words this past Sunday and enjoyed the program very much. It certainly was a lively session, and Mary and I thought you gave a very good account of yourself. Of course I, with my usual vanity, was delighted to hear my own name mentioned.1

Now we shall be watching for the Citizen's Forum show.

As ever,
Des Pacey

DP/ll

1When the second quotation (see 72.4) was read, Layton suggested "Desmond Pacey" as its author, to which moderator Nathan Cohen replied, "Desmond Pacey of New Brunswick? No."

75.[pc]
Monday [December 24, 1956pm]

Dear Desmond,

I suppose you got that long letter on Klein with all the sensational trimmings. The girl I dictated the letter to works in St James Street--one of the big trusts--so I guess she must have given you the preferred treatment. I didn't see the thing before it was sent out, otherwise I would have personalized it with some arch vulgarisms.

I sent you that information as background material which I thought you might find useful. One question you asked--I forgot to answer: is Klein still working on his commentary of Ulysses? Truly, I don't know. My guess, however, would be that he isn't. Incidentally, to my knowledge no one has paid sufficient tribute to Klein's work
in the field of Joycean scholarship. He makes the other boys, including the latest, Hugh Kenner1, look positively sick. Bet’s a stinker when it comes to writing. Tell Mary we loved her Xmas card and the picture of herself. The Season’s Greetings to both of you.

Irv


76.[pc] Friday [January 11, 1957pm]
Dear Desmond,

Well, I’ve learned from Anne Wilkinson who phoned me long distance last night that Ryerson Press won’t let a single copy of The Improved Binoculars leave their premises.1 Anne learned all this when she requested a review copy,2 and back came the answer sharp and snippety that TiBBY was not going to be sold by them. I had surmised that something was monstrously afoot when the local booksellers told me their orders for the book had not been filled. Now someone on the Globe & Mail wants to spread the story on their pages, and I’m going to meet with her3 this Sunday when I go up to Toronto for another Fighting Words program.4 If anything breaks I’ll keep you well-posted.

Anything I’ve given you in the way of reminiscence and criticism is strictly between ourselves. If you should use any of that material, I want no credit given to me. I’m eager that you do a first-rate book, and if I can serve you in any way, let me know. The person to whom I dictated the letter has no more interest in poetry than I in public plumbing.

Yrs,

Irv

1Cameron comments on this incident in her biography:
Pierce, or rather the editorial committee of his publishing house, which was affiliated with the United Church, did one final about-face that left Layton without a Canadian publisher for his book. Two of the poems proposed for Tibby were offensive to Ryerson’s committee. “De Bullion Street,” which described a ‘mission’ and a ‘Church’ as ‘haemmorrhoids upon the city’s anus,’ and "The Poetic Process," which alluded to ‘the blood and balls of Christ,’ seemed too strong to be included, and the committee decided not to act as Layton’s Canadian publisher.

2Anne Wilkinson was one of the founding editors of Tamrak Review in the autumn of 1956 (along with Kildare Dobbs, Ivon Owen, Millar MacLure, William Toye and Robert Weaver).

3Lotta Dempsey; see 77.2.

4Fighting Words, CBC Television, 13 Jan. 1957.
January 14, [1957]

Dear Irving,

Thanks for Friday’s card. I have been missing your cards.

The news about Ryerson Press is truly shocking. I suppose that what must have happened is that some of the reverend gentlemen of the United Church have read the book & have become alarmed, and that poor Lorne Pierce is in hot water again as he was over Grove’s Settlers of the Marsh thirty years ago. Don’t blame Pierce—he is probably fighting for you. What can be done I don’t know. Surely they should let you know directly, & not handle the matter in this underhand fashion. Would you like me to write to Pierce & express my views? If you want me to do anything, let me know.

What do you think of the latest issue of the Forum? I enjoyed Smith’s letter, and I hope you take it in good part & realize that that sort of thing is both good fun & good publicity & does no-one any real harm. Dudek in particular is a prime target for satire as he takes himself so seriously. Dobbs’s review of Dudek’s book is probably too severe, though as no-one has sent me The Transparent Sea & I’ve never seen it on sale, I haven’t read it & can’t really comment.

I finished my Scott chapter—30pp—& am now re-reading everything I can find by & about Klein. What’s he living on now? Is he still practising law? Would it be worth my while to go through the Canadian Jewish Chronicle? Does he still edit that? For how long was he editor? Someone—a student—told me that Klein was a very bad lawyer, that Chait & Klein did poorly when he was in the firm & has done much better since he quit. Is there anything at all in this? It doesn’t sound reasonable to me.

Shall be looking forward to seeing you again on Fighting Words. Don’t think I’ve told you how sorry I felt for you on that Citizen’s Forum thing—that man Henshaw was such an ass & the other panelists weren’t much better. Several people here have said you were the only one worth a damn. I should just have liked to have punched that bloody fool Henshaw in the jaw—I almost said in the testicles but I don’t think he has any.

We’ve sent two of Mary’s pictures to each of the Toronto & Hamilton exhibitions, but don’t know whether they have been accepted.

I shall of course use the utmost discretion in using anything you tell me about Klein. Obviously I can’t say much about his private life during his lifetime, but as you say it is good background material.

My love to Betty, & this anecdote for your mutual enjoyment. Sir Thomas Beecham was rehearsing an orchestra in which there was a woman cellist. She was playing badly & time after time he had to stop to caution her. Finally he turned to her & said “Madam, you have something between your
legs that could give pleasure to millions—and all you do is scratch it!"

As ever,
Des

1Frederick Philip Grove (Felix Paul Greve) (1879-1948), German/Canadian novelist (Settlers of the Marsh 1925; The Master of the Mill 1944), and short story writer (Over Prairie Trails 1922).

2Grove discusses this controversy in his autobiography:
Briefly, the outcome was that, in the summer of 1925, George Doran printed the book in New York; and the Ryerson Press handled it in Canada. Its publication became a public scandal. Libraries barred it—London, Ontario, forming an honorable exception; reviewers called it "filthy"—W.T. Allison over the radio; Lorne Pierce nearly lost his job over it; people who had been ready to lionize me cut me dead in the street.

Frederick Philip Grove, In Search of Myself (Toronto: Macmillan, 1946) 381.

3Pacey refers to Smith's letter to the editor in the January 1957 Canadian Forum:
I found Mr. Irving Layton's letter in your October issue very entertaining, but much too long. For the sake of posterity I have ventured to make a precis of it and turn it into verse...

"I smell, you smell, we all smell," I wrote. Alas,
The bourgeois critics took me for an ass.
You culture-prudes, you morons, shame-faced, shy,
Reproachful Birney, sheep-like Smith, deaf Frye,
Cold Anglo-Saxons all, not one of you
A laughter-loving Bulgur, Russ, or Jew.
Watson you praise, but Dudek not enough,
Turning your noses up at Dirty Stuff,
A poem, beautiful, audacious, sane,
About a tart who didn't pull the chain.
Dare they deny us, Dudek, you and I,
The laurels of the privy and plaudits of the sty,
Bold rebels for the right to shout out sh-t
And lard our poems with it 'stead of wit?

I make no claim for these verses...The only quality they fail to catch is the humorless seriousness and self-righteous indignation with which Mr. Layton castigates "those white-livered renegades, Frye, Wilson, Smith and MacLure" for, among other things, a "failure to applaud with humility and gratitude." What?—Dudek's ponderous and pompous piece of stale Poundcake, Europe! However, Layton and Dudek are rapidly making themselves the ideal objects of classical satire, and I hope they will be around a long time to provide fit subjects for the muse of comedy."

Layton replies in the March issue of Canadian Forum (282).

4Kildare Dobbs (b. 1923), journalist, writer and broadcaster who came to Canada in 1952; staff writer for the Toronto Star 1962-5, a founder of the Tamarack Review, author of Running to Paradise (1962) and Coastal Canada (1985).

5Dobbs' review of Dudek's book is entirely negative:
it looks as if Mr. Dudek is a lover of poetry, ambitious to wear the laurel, but, unfortunately, deficient in that overflowing poetic talent to which he pretends. Most of his work is forced or insipid, but posterity will remember him as the man who played Billy Graham to Irving Layton's Messiah.


Klein edited the Canadian Jewish Chronicle from 1939-55.

Klein practised law with Samuel Chait in 1935—a year later he entered into partnership with Max Garmaise; in 1938 he rejoined the law firm of Chait.

Samuel Chait (1904-82), Montreal lawyer, Queen's Counsel for the province of Quebec, Klein's law partner 1938-54.

Donald Henshaw.

Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961), English conductor, founder of the London Philharmonic and the Royal Philharmonic.

Monday [January 14, 1957pm]

Poet's Progress

I wrote a book, News of the Phoenix,
It was clean, it was cleaner than Kleenex.
Ah, white it was, and spotless so
Like a cemetery under snow.
And like snow, odorless, lacking breath
In the nice perfection of death;
For where I'd choked each human groan
I marked the place with a tombstone,
Till some averred I was classical
And others that I was merely dull.
Alas, I was neither, but unread
I was, if anything, dead.
Dead, until renewing excrement fell
Upon each wintry cell
Excrement of such potency that it
Revised bones and buried wit.
O the very sound
Of its falling fertilized the ground
That now, aroused puts forth
A gracious stinkweed of some sort
O ecstasy! To feel my earth
Know resurrection, and a new birth.
To see my little stinkweed bloom
In the Canadian Forum;
To watch, incredulous, the stem grow
From my cultivated marrow.
Brave plant! O genial power
Of Layton's prepotent manure
That made the withered root sprout
A fragrant couplet.
Nay, not one--seven!
O lucky hour! O reviving rain!
For see, to the farthest edge, my field
Cluster upon smelling cluster yields:
A proud eye here, another there, but
All half-blinking through its load* of smut.
I arise, tardily I arise thus
A much bespattered Dionysius
Or a fiery phoenix who first
Drinks brine to allay his thirst
Then shakes from his awful wings
Bright excrement, and as he shakes, he sings—-
Yet whether as god or fowl, crowned, ah, classed
The Pope of the pissoir, and poet at last.

* I want a better word but I haven’t my Roget here.

Monday
Dear Desmond,
I hope this and the enclosed item will amuse and interest you. The interview was given when I was in Toronto this weekend for another Fighting Words (rotten show!) and arranged by Anne Wilkinson. She knows someone on the Globe & Mail. Well, I’m cheesed off on the whole racket--TV shows, interviews, etc and would like very much to get back to the quiet obscurity I knew in happier days. Believe me, this isn’t the usual corn, I heartily mean it. They’re all lousy distractions from what I want to do most, and can do best--viz, write poetry. So if I dive underground, and you no longer hear from or about me, you now possess the key to unlock the mystery. It’s good-bye to all that. The two worlds of poetry and publicity are poles apart, and I’m not that foolish to think they can be mixed together. All my best wishes to Mary.

Yours as ever,
Irving

enclosure: Lotta Dempsey, "Poet Attacks Publisher’s Attitude" Toronto Globe and Mail, 14 Jan. 1957.


Wednesday [January 16, 1957]
Dear Desmond,
My Bet read me parts from your good-humoured letter. Thanks for your generous remarks on my TV performance on Citizen’s Forum. A pity Henshit was such as ass. But I did lay a large egg in Nathan Cohen’s lap in the last Fighting Words. I was suddenly overcome by that sense of unreality that affected Samuel Johnson at times--I guess we all are occasionally, but that was no time for it to happen. Pierce, I do not blame at all, but sympathize most deeply with for having to work for such an outfit. RP still hasn’t told me outright they wdn’t distribute the book. I think it
wd only distress Pierce further if you wrote him but thanks for the interest. Smith’s thing made me laugh, such things I think you know don’t upset me, I relish them. Have sent my poem to the CF with an accompanying letter⁴ that is not too ill-natured. K. Dobbs review was quite unfair. I’ll send you The Transparent Sea.⁵ Love to Mary. I’ll write more on Klein.

Yrs,
Irv


¹Nathan Cohen (1923-71), theatre critic, radio and television commentator, host of CBC TV’s discussion program Fighting Words.


³Layton is perhaps referring to Johnson’s prayer:
When I survey my past life, I discover nothing but a barren waste of time, with some disorders of body, and disturbances of the mind, very near to madness, which I hope He that made me will suffer to extenuate many faults, and excuse many deficiencies.

Or he may be alluding to Boswell’s observation:
Johnson, whose supreme enjoyment was the exercise of his reason, the disturbance or obscuration of that faculty was the evil most to be dreaded. Insanity, therefore, was the object of his most dismal apprehension; and he fancied himself seized by it, or approaching to it, at the very time when he was giving proof of a more than ordinary soundness and vigour of judgement.


⁴Irving Layton, letter, Canadian Forum Mar. 1957: 282. (The Forum published Layton’s letter, in part, but not the accompanying poem "Poet’s Progress" with this note: "Mr. Layton’s letter is twice as long as this, but, since the correspondence of which it is the latest part has been going on for nearly a year, we have ventured to start abbreviating."

⁵Louis Dudek, The Transparent Sea (Toronto: Contact, 1956).

January 21, 1957
Dear Irving,

Just a note to thank you for the additional cards & clippings & the Dudek book. I haven’t had a chance to read the latter yet, as it just arrived this morning, but I’ll read it tonight & let you know what I think.

Saw Fighting Words yesterday, & realize why you didn’t enjoy the program. The quotations were not very inspiring, & the other panelists were too smooth & polite. You need someone like Callaghan to fight with on a programme like that. You were very quiet, but I don’t see that you made any great blunders. What was the gaffe you referred to? I was amused at your virtuous comments on the first quotation,
thought you all missed the point of Muggeridge’s quotation
(which is exaggerated of course, a half-truth, but still has
something in it—the English are snobs & have assumed that
an Eton-Oxford man like Eden is invulnerable—they now see
he’s a weakling), & felt that you all made a mess of the
last quotation (which didn’t make sense out of its context
anyway).1

Sent Scott the draft of my chapter on him & he says he
thinks it comes nearer the truth than anything written
before.2 Am finding Klein hard to get a good angle on.
Will write later—have a class now.

Love,
Des

1 This quotation cannot be identified because a tape of this television program does not
exist at the CBC Library in Toronto nor at the National Archives in Ottawa.
2 F.R. Scott, letter to Desmond Pacey, 9 Jan. 1957, Pacey Papers, National Archives of
Canada. ("I think you have done a very good piece of work, and have got much closer to what I think
is the truth than anyone else who has tried.")

Dear Desmond,

Here’s something full of wisdom from F.R. Scott’s
"Press Report":

But with a twist of headline
The lie is said
And truth upon the deadline
Lies wholly dead.

What I said to the Star reporter and what appeared the
following day had little connection.2 Ryerson Press isn’t
keeping TiBBY—Pierce suggested they’d send me the whole
lot, provided I’d keep quiet about the whole affair. He
didn’t put it quite that crudely, but I’m sure I’m not
misconstruing the sense of his words. My quarrel is not
with the publishers, at any rate, not mainly, but with the
schools & universities that have kept alive a musty
Victorian ethos and equate poetry with fine sentiments,
romantic bilge. That never came across in the press report.
To make sure I was giving the other side a fair shake I read
them Pierce’s letter to me.3 Nevertheless, reading the
story in the press, one wd get the notion TiBBY was being
banned outright. I have written to the TT to protest their
version... Much good it will do.

Yrs,
Irv

2 "Noted Poet Laments Culture’s Sad State."
3 Lorne Pierce, letter to Irving Layton, 10 Jan. 1957, Irving Layton Collection, Concordia
University.
Dear Desmond,

Did I write you McC & S were interested in bringing out *The Improved Binoculars*? Well, they were. They wished to publish it as an Indian File Book, generously, even gave assent to additional poems. But it wasn’t what either I or Jonathan Williams cared about, so the deal has fallen through.¹ I wanted McC & S to let J.W. print the book in the US for them but this—it was a matter of principle they said—they couldn’t permit. So we’re going ahead on our own, going though it’ll strain my finances and my fine temper to the limit. I’m arranging to give readings at McGill and the colleges hereabouts. I’ve got to sell those copies somehow, though with the publicity which the book has got, that shd not be too impossible...I haven’t heard from Pierce, probably won’t, though I’ve offered to take the whole embarrassing shipment off their offended ecclesiastical shoulders. What a farcical episode. Cd such nonsense happen anywhere else but here?

Yrs,
Irv

¹McClelland and Stewart became Layton’s publisher beginning with *A Red Carpet for the Sun* in 1959.

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February 6, 1957

Dear Irving,

I have received several postcards from you which I must acknowledge. Since I haven’t seen most of the press reports to which you allude, your cards are somewhat ambiguous. I hope you manage to find some way of distributing your book. What I am hoping, and think may quite probably happen, is that your book will win the Governor-General’s Award. Then won’t Ryerson Press’s face be red! Of course we mustn’t count our chickens, but we can hope, can’t we?

I am still toiling away at Klein—picking up biographical information from all of his friends and associates, taking a short course in Judaism from Rabbi Spiro² (who knows you, and likes your poetry!), poring over the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, tracking down allusions in his verse, etc etc. I should be ready to start writing now in a few days.

Mary & I would like to get away from the kids for a few days at Easter. One of my former students has offered to keep house. We might come to Montreal, or we might go to New York or Boston. What do you suggest?

Mary is feeling quite blue as the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour rejected her offerings. She is
easily discouraged, and I’m having a hard time convincing her that such things don’t mean much.

What did you think of the second issue of Tamarack Review?3 The whole thing strikes me as pretty pallid fare.

All the best,

Des

1Jay Macpherson’s The Boatman won the Governor General’s Award for Poetry for 1957.

2Rabbi David Spiro (b. 1923) of Sgoolai Israel Synagogue, leader of Fredericton’s Jewish community since his arrival in August 1944.

3The second issue of Tamarack Review (winter, 1957) appeared in January.

Dear Desmond,

Bet tells me there’s a letter from you waiting for me when I get home. But here I am with a half-an-hour on my hands, and I’m weary of reading Strachey’s Contemporary Capitalism.1 Good book, mind you, level-headed—very profitable reading. He’s altered some of his earlier views on Marxism and the SU: he now makes a fair bid towards becoming the best theorist of contemporary Socialism. He’s travelled a long way from his first book The Coming Struggle for Power.2

How’s your chapter on Klein coming along? Have you started it yet? It occurs to me you might study the life and work of Heine to make some kind of comparison: anyhow, ideas will come to you. Both were concerned with their Jewish inheritance, both were great wits. Bringing in Heine or Disraeli will give you a chance to place Can Lit in the stream of European thought to rub off some of its parochialism, more illusory perhaps, than real. Study carefully K’s "Design for a Medieval Tapestry"3 (note how strong is the idea of the "suffering Jew" in his poems) and compare them with Heine’s poems dealing with Jewish subjects. Don’t fall back on the usual gentile cliches of Klein’s Hebrew erudition, etc etc and let it go at that. Probe, compare, analyze.

Yrs,

Irv

1John Strachey, Contemporary Capitalism (London: Gollancz, 1956).


Dear Irving,

I think that for once you owe me a letter but I thought I'd drop you a line to tell you that I've finished my chapter on Klein and that I am proud of it. It runs to well over fifty pages of manuscript, and I feel that I have at least got close to the heart of the matter. Your comments were very helpful. I looked into the Heine matter, but the links are pretty tenuous—but I've mentioned some of them.¹

I also got some very useful information from Max Garmaise² & Rabbi Schwartz.³ But I soaked myself in books on Judaism & went through the Canadian Jewish Chronicle, & though I couldn’t use a quarter of the material I gathered, I felt that I was writing from an excess of knowledge rather than guessing from ignorance.

The one thing that still puzzles me is why people like yourself & Scott, who were once so friendly to Klein, seem to have nothing but hostility now. Has the poor bugger committed the sin against the Holy Ghost by giving up Marxism to return to orthodoxy, or what?

My story "The Odour of Incense" has been accepted by Canadian Forum,⁴ after being turned down by Tamarack Review. What do you think of the latter anyway? I liked Cohen’s interview with Richler⁵ in the last, but not much else.

I've already started work on Birney. What do you think—quite frankly—of these as chapter headings:

- The Poet as Pioneer: Sangster⁶
- The Poet as Painter: Roberts
- The Poet as Singer: Carman⁷
- The Wheel and the Wheels: Lampman⁸
- The Storm and the Silence: D.C. Scott⁹
- The Temple and the Cave: E.J. Pratt
- The Poet as Craftsman: Smith
- The Poet as Citizen: F.R. Scott
- The Poet as Psalmist: A.M. Klein
- The Poet as Chronicler: E. Birney

Give my love to Betty. Can’t think of any jokes at the moment.

All the best,

Des P

¹Pacey mentions the Heine/Klein comparison twice; on 260 he notes:

Even here, however, the irony which so often tinctures his [Klein’s] romanticism, as it tinctures Heine’s and Byron’s, is apparent in the title ["Business"], so that we are being prepared for that mixture of passion and irony which, though not unique, is rare in poetry and gives to Klein’s later work much of its piquancy.

²And on 268, in discussing Klein’s "Manuscript: Thirteenth Century," Pacey states:

Possibly inspired by such pseudo-medieval ballads as Heine’s "Donna Clara," which in form and tone it somewhat resembles, this poem tells the story of an outlaw named Sir Roland who seduces the maiden Blanche and then abandons her.
Dear Desmond,

Yours in today, and most welcome. What must I do to convince you I am NOT hostile to A.M. Klein? Indeed, I shd be sorry if you started flying that one, for all our sakes, but chiefly because it isn’t true. I did call him an eagle—a trussed one to be sure—but still, an eagle, and as a Joycean scholar I said he was unbeatable. Is this the language of hostility? Also, again and again, I underscored his wit, brilliancy and talent. He was the first to teach me something of the poet’s craft and also among the few at the beginning, a long time before Smith, Frye, and Wilson, to recognize my powers, his review of Here and Now in the Jewish Chronicle being the only perceptive and laudatory review which that book received in this country. I am not the sort of being to forget such things. It was not anger or animosity—I have reasons for neither—that I wanted to set down, but disappointment. A.M.K was never a Marxist, and he hasn’t returned to the orthodox faith. Probably you were thinking of my supposed hostility to John Sutherland: that I was hostile to HIM because of his renegacy. But it wasn’t John’s conversion to Catholicism which angered me, it was his use of Catholicism as a club to beat his former associates over the head. Despite the nice obituary notices which he received, I feel religion had less to do with his conversion than envy and frustration. A myth is already growing up around him: to me it’s all so much eyewash, Canadian blab. For Sutherland poetry as experience never existed, there were times I was convinced he hated the stuff. I used to tell him so, too. Abstractions, clouds of
metaphysical vagueness, literary parallelograms and vectors were the things he sought in poetry. Of genuine intuition he had not a trace. In short, he was the sort of critic I abominate, the sort I pray "to leave the stuff alone". It was no surprise to me he turned Catholic; had he lived longer he might have become a Buddhist, anything to fill the deep intractable emptiness inside him. Weaver’s praise of him for leaving behind the social concerns of the forties is undeserved, besides missing the point at issue. But it isn’t decorous to speak truth, so let’s have some more Canadian flabbiness, Canadian sentimentality.

To get back to Klein. You asked me for reasons that might explain his nervous breakdown and his present sterility. I gave to you what seemed to me the true facts of the case, hiding nothing. But surely, taking everything I have written on the matter, my sympathy with him ought to be evident. Were it not for his present agitated condition making literary friendships more difficult than usual, I’d be seeing him as often as formerly. But one doesn’t ring bells in a house of mourning, if you know what I mean. I don’t think he’s very much interested in poetry just now, nor in meeting me or anyone else who might remind him poetry was important. There’s a Jewish proverb which runs to the effect that in a home where there’s been a hanging one doesn’t mention "rope". Let me repeat myself: the tragedy of A.M. Klein is that of brilliant promise unfulfilled. I say this without any anger or hostility, but because I believe it to be the sober truth. I’ll go further. I’ll say that if in your study of him this fact doesn’t emerge, you’ve misread the man’s career entirely and have not really come to terms with either the significance of his failure or the inner and outer forces that shaped it.

Heine. I didn’t mean for you to look for possible influences on A.M. Klein. I think I did suggest that you might study his Jewish poems and lay those alongside Klein’s. Both were keenly conscious of their Jewishness, but wd Klein call Judaism, as Heine does, "The plague they brought with them from the Nile valley"? This is from HH’s poem "The New Israelite Hospital in Hamburg". For God’s sake, read his "Hebrew Melodies". You have a treasure there, all sorts of comparisons will spring to your mind. The question--how does each respond to the gentile civilization around them? Another question--What does being a Jew mean for Heine and Klein? What is the function of irony and self-irony in each? What sort of Jew is missing in his "Design for a Medieval Tapestry"? Answer: the fighter. It’s in this field you can do very exciting work and astound all the other critics. However...

Candidly, I don’t go for your chapter headings. First of all because it smacks of highschool amateurishness, like putting a finger in the reader’s eye. If Sangster is a pioneer and Carman a singer, that ought to appear in what you’ve written abt them. There’s no point in tying a pretty bow over them. Also, it begins to smack too much of
academia, the PhD thesis—are you really trying to prove all these things or are you trying to write sensitive and searching criticism? I take it you’re trying to do the latter. Well, then, if the chap’s a poet, you can bet on it, he wasn’t writing his heart out so’s for a Desmond Pacey to lay out in a neat phrase. Christ, your headings sound like tombstone inscriptions. Anyway, the whole thing is factitious and artificial: is Scott, for example, less a "chronicler" than Birney? Is Smith really a "craftsman"? It is commonly supposed so, another one of our Canadian myths, and I imagine you’ve gone and added to it. Yet what he doesn’t know about technique wd fill volumes; "know" isn’t quite the right word, because a poet’s knowledge in this matter doesn’t extend farther than his passion and experience. What I’m trying to say is that Smith’s blather abt "craft" etc, might impress you who don’t write the stuff, but is just so much shit to myself who does. I can just imagine the reams of nonsense you must have written on this subject, I can almost select the adjectives for you—"Restraint", "Control", "Precise". Yes? What some critics never seem to realize is that technique without intuition or power or human experience is so much empty, meaningless chatter, as ludicrous as the muscular jerks medical students make their cadavers perform for their amusement. Yes, corpse-like twitchings, rather than techniques, are what I’d call them. But, go ahead, have your fun...

You’ll hate me, but one last caution in this rather critical letter. One of your chapter headings is "The Wheel and the Wheels". Did you incorporate the material of an article you once wrote on Lampman? You sent LS Dudek a transcript of it, and he showed it to me. Something about a cow chewing the cud, signifying what? Cosmic rotation? I think you were doing an analysis of Lampman’s "Heat". I thought, frankly, it was New Criticism* gone mad! If you do use it, I warn you in all friendship, you’ll be identified with that cud-chewing cow as long as you live. That’s just the sort of thing unfriendly persons and reviewers like to pounce on. But no doubt you’ve decided against its inclusion.

Well, I’ve got to bring this long letter to a close. Betty has put the kettle on for tea; just now she’s chuckling over something in Alpers’ biography of Katherine Mansfield. What have you decided about your Easter holidays? We’d very much like to see you. Look here, there’s a chance I might be in New York then—couldn’t we meet somewhere and have some fun together? It all depends upon whether the Am immigration revokes its decision against allowing me to enter the USA. You know I’ve been battling them ever since 1946. However, there’s a reasonable chance I’ll come up with victory this time. Nothing wd give me greater pleasure than seeing Grant’s tomb with you and Mary. Arriba!
I’m delighted to hear from you Can Forum has taken your story. Accept my congratualations. About TR—I feel pretty much as you do. Outside of Nathan Cohen’s interview with Richler, there wasn’t much to raise an outcry. As I told the editors in Toronto, one wd never know by reading TR that this was 1957, and there were great political and moral issues blasting their way towards resolution. Torontonian Tiredness. Well-meaning insipidities. All so remote, so blind, so complacent, so unreal, so tranquillizing, so futile.

All our love to you all.

Yrs,
Irv P

*New Criticism with a touch of sunstroke!

1Layton began showing his poems and stories to A.M. Klein in 1929, when he was a student at Baron Byng high school.

2A.M. Klein, rev. of Here and Now by Irving Layton, Canadian Jewish Chronicle 8 May 1945: 8.

3Irving Layton, Here and Now (Montreal: First Statement, 1945).

4Sutherland’s willingness to write off so much of his own past was admirable." Robert Weaver, "John Sutherland and Northern Review," Tamarack Review 2 (winter 1957): 65-69.


6Hebrew Melodies" is the central section of Heine’s Romanzero (Hamburg: Hoffman & Campe, 1851).


9Layton had been listed as an undesirable alien by American immigration officials due to his membership in various left-wing groups (see 96.3) following his discharge from the Canadian Army in 1943.

A classic-style mausoleum containing the remains of President Ulysses S. Grant and his wife Julia Dent Grant, located on Riverside Drive, New York City.

87.[pc] Tuesday [February 26, 1957pm]

Dear Desmond,

No poet sets out to be a “pioneer”, “painter”, “craftsman” etc. He sets out to be a poet, and, the gods willing, he becomes one. Besides being arbitrary, your chapter headings make a cage to keep your tamed animals in, or a morgue slab on which you lay them neatly out. My worst fear, is that by writing about poetry in other terms than poetry itself, you will evade the critic’s responsibility to evaluate and assess, ie write about the "singer", "psalmist", etc, and not about the poet himself, his
strengths and weaknesses, his originality, etc. But no doubt you’ve thought abt that without me. Of course, what I like to see is a textual analysis of poems, but one which goes beyond the arid scholasticisms of the new critics to explicate biography, social pressures and so on, as well as showing the critic’s response to rhythms, language, discourse...Have you read Heine’s "The Disputation"?

Yrs,
Irv

1Heinrich Heine, "The Disputation,” Complete Poems 677-88. (A dramatic presentation of a medieval debate between rabbis and priests.)

88.[pc] Wednesday [February 27, 1957pm]
Dear Desmond,
Have you The Poetry and Prose of H. Heine, edited by Ewen?1 The section, "Israel"2 will repay your careful reading. I think it’ll give you some kind of perspective on Klein’s Hath Not a Jew. That book, and The Rocking Chair contain some of his best and most enduring work. And they’re connected, like the back and front of a man’s hand. If the bourgeois had been crushed in him, or if Klein had lived in Berlin or Paris, I think he had enough genius in him to have equalled his brilliant forerunner. You should have known him in his heyday, when his wit and good-humoured sallies were the delight of the company. He could have gone farther than any of us—well, perhaps he has. I feel there’s a fascinating problem there for you to explore. But it’s you who are writing the book, not I, and I’d better learn to keep a civil tongue in my head. By the way, do you know it was on Klein’s account I finally broke with John Sutherland? It was the latter’s animadversions on the Rocking Chair,3 as well as my feeling, growing stronger day by day, that he actually hated poetry that finally made me stop seeing him. Still, de mortuis4 and all that sort of thing. Betty was grateful to you for yr obituary in The Fiddlehead.5 So was I—with one half of my brain—

Yrs,
Irv


2"Israel" is the third section (167-204) of Ewen’s edition.

3John Sutherland, rev. of The Rocking Chair by AM Klein, Northern Review 2 (1949): 30-34.

4Latin: de mortuis nihil nisi bonum: (say) nothing but good about the dead.

5Layton refers to Pacey’s tribute to Sutherland:
As this issue of The Fiddlehead is about to go to press, we have learned of the death of John Sutherland. I consider it a privilege to be allowed to pay a brief tribute to his memory.
As editor of First Statement from 1942 to 1945, and of Northern Review since that time, Sutherland did much to encourage young writers in Canada and to foster an intelligent interest in our literature. Whatever his opinions—and unless one has undergone the same conversion from Marxism to Catholic Christianity that he underwent, one cannot accept all of his opinions—they were always held passionately, expressed loudly, and defended vigorously. He may have been dogmatic, but he was never dull; he may have been narrow, but he was always intense. His courage was never more finely exemplified than in the last weeks of his life when, from the enforced immobility of his stricken frame, he completed his subtle book on E.J. Pratt, and issued the final number of Northern Review.

John’s book on Pratt is probably the finest piece of sustained analysis of the work of a Canadian poet that has ever been published, and it produces a fitting monument for Sutherland’s career. The book is the mature product of a critic whose detached insights had always been brilliant, but who had here added the unremitting discipline and patience that sustained criticism demands. It is a great pity that this evolved talent was not spared for the task of further enriching our scanty store of good criticism. But his contribution was a memorable one, and made him the most vigorous Canadian critic of his generation.


March 1, 1957

Dear Irving,

Well, in the very same mail with the letter in which you hit me like a ton of bricks there’s a letter from Daniels asking me to recommend you for a fellowship, so naturally being a bit of a bastard I write him at once and say if you give as much as five cents to that battering bastard I’ll beat your brains out. So there—that oughta fix you!

Seriously, your letter and cards hurt. Why do you insist on addressing me as an inferior, as a silly ass who can’t write worth a damn and has no business trying to be a critic? I’m working like hell on this book and I need support, confidence. I can’t do my best if people make fun of me—I’m terribly vulnerable and though I try to kid myself out of it, I can’t. [PS After writing this letter, my self-pity has evaporated! Have at ‘em!]

I’ll take back what I said about your hostility to Klein—I used words loosely. But don’t you see that while the man is alive I can’t openly discuss his megalomania, etc.? I still think that I’ve said something new & useful about Klein—not what you would say, of course, but something which from my point of view is honest, perceptive, and certainly more comprehensive than anything published hitherto. (By the way, it’s Dudek who talks of the Marxism in Klein—in my chapter I say that I see little evidence for it!)

Your letters & postcards re Klein have been very useful. I appreciate your help & interest. I don’t think I can pursue the Heine parallels because I just would be dishonest to pretend that I know Heine well enough to make the comparisons. I could read Heine—I have read a lot of Heine—but I couldn’t really get to know him. Anyway, I’ve
got too much Klein material already, & I’d hate to cut any of it out.

You’re probably right about the chapter headings. F.R. Scott doesn’t like them either. I wasn’t twisting my material to fit the titles—actually the titles grew out of the written chapters rather than vice versa—but I can see that it might lead to that conclusion. Thanks for being so frank on that point. Do you just want a list of names? OK.

My chapter on Smith isn’t at all what you seem to think it is. Actually I am perhaps more critical of Smith than of anyone. So you can just imagine the reams of nonsense, eh? Well, you always have had a lively imagination...

That cow chewing its cud was a joke in the "Heat" article—why so sure that my humour is unintentional? Bud Trueman read that in ms & said they’d laugh at me for it—and I said let them laugh. If Dudek laughed at himself a bit more he’d be a better poet than he is.

Tuesday’s card—"explicate biography, social pressures etc"—just what I’ve tried to do!

Wednesday’s card—have I read Heine? Have you read my teacup?

So long, and keep your pecker up!

As ever,
Des Pacey

143.


3Roy Daniells served on the Canada Council fellowship committee from 1956-60.

4Pacey refers to Dudek’s 1950 article on Klein:

As one divides the work of poets into “periods,” Klein has so far had three...the period of the World Depression, when he was aping T.S. Eliot and writing Marxist satires...Klein, moreover, was using Eliot’s delicate anguish to express the hammering certainties of Karl Marx (11-12).


5The F.R. Scott chapter in Ten Canadian Poets contains the following remarks:

Some critics have said that at this time Klein was under the influence of Marxism, and the references in these poems to Marx and to the evils of capitalism give some basis for the assertion. But I see nothing of specifically Marxist doctrine in the poems, nothing that goes beyond the words of the Psalmist, "The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor, let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined."

6F.R. Scott, letter to Desmond Pacey, 25 Feb. 1957, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

7In Ten Canadian Poets, the ten chapter titles consist of the poets’ names and dates.

8The A.J.M. Smith chapter in Ten Canadian Poets contains the following:
A.J.M. Smith had been a resident of the United States for over half of his lifetime, and has produced a small body of poetry——only, in fact, two slim volumes, the second of which reprints a good deal of the contents of the first (194). He is a master craftsman, a poet from whom other poets can learn many of the subtleties of technique; on the other hand he has neither the explosive force, the musical charm, nor the clearly formulated set of ideas which either singly or in some combination make a poet a great popular figure (207). ...the brilliance of these technical effects goes a long way towards compensating for the slight output and narrow range of Smith’s poetry. He is perhaps a minor poet, if a major critical influence....(221)

Albert ("Bud") Trueman (1902—c83), university professor and administrator, Professor of English at Mount Allison University (1930—42), President, University of Manitoba (1945—48), President, University of New Brunswick (1948—53), Director of the Canada Council (1957—65); author of The United Empire Loyalists (1946).

90.[pc]
Tuesday [March 5, 1957]
Dear Des,
Yours in yesterday, and very welcome. I’ll write you a letter sometime this week and enclose one or two items that might interest you. Did you see the review of The Bull Calf in The Dalhousie Review?1 Who is D.G.L.?2 J. Williams now writes the improved Imp Binox won’t be out until late March. May ten plagues strike him. Here I’ve ruptured myself trying to get readings at McGill and elsewhere—and no book! No books to sell, I mean! What a catastrophe. I’m in debt, overdrawn at the bank, my next two months salary entailed. The literary life! I’m glad you found my comments on AMK useful. The Heine business was just a thought, but you’re probably right to ignore it. I take back, with haste, "the reams of nonsense" re Smith. I think your book will be first-class——my snarls are intended as roughage, bran. Also, alas, I was an unloved child, reared in a slum, and sat upon by many hefty asses for a good part of my life. I had to shout to make anyone hear me...Much of my poetry is an attempt to get back a quiet road I lost. But I’ll mend, I’ll mend.

Yrs,
Irv


2Douglas Lochhead (b. 1922), poet, librarian, Professor of Canadian Studies and Director of the Centre for Canadian Studies at Mount Allison University 1975-87; author of The Full Furnace: Collected Poems (1973) and Tiger in the Skull: New and Selected Poems (1986).

91.[pc]
Thursday [March 7, 1957pm]
Dear Desmond,
For more than two thousand years the poet as well as the Jew have been sentimental idiots, taken in by their own verbiage. The poet had his fine notions of beauty, honour, etc; the Jew his lofty ethics. The world has rewarded them
as it always does the vaporous weak: the one, with a garret; the other, with a ghetto. I confess, when I realize to whom, to what insensitive brutes, poets have addressed their fine madrigals and delicate lyrics, I want to vomit. At such moments I could exterminate, gladly, the whole lying tribe of weaklings and imposters. Their job is not to write beautiful poems for the moneyed swine, the bureaucrats and their licksplittles which our middleclass civilization is spawning in greater and greater numbers. Their job is to make every poem a bullet in their piggish foreheads. And since you’ve got swine and bureaucrats in the Soviet Union as well, that’s the job of the communist poet too! But things are changing fast. The Israelis have a first-class army, and this here poet is no "Willie" Yeats.¹

¹Layton alludes to Yeats' unwillingness to support the revolutionary struggle for Irish independence being waged by, among others, his friend Maud Gonne (see 226.2).

Thursday [March 7, 1957pm]

Dear Des,

It’s because I take your book very seriously that I snarl and yelp so much. It can be a landmark in Cndn criticism, or it can be—well, just another good book. There’s no one writing criticism in Canada that I’d ever say this to: you’re the only one that has the feel of this country whose outlook on literature is broadly social and political. But, how much are you really aware of the political & ideological currents of our time, changing so rapidly and so violently? I sometimes wonder. It seems to me four major revolutions are taking place in our times: the artistic, the social, the sexual and the secular, and not even the Rockies on the one side nor the Laurentian Shield on the other can isolate the Canadians from their combined impact. Ethically, in the hearts and consciences of men, the bourgeois system has completely collapsed: it’s the surviving fragments in the soul that are responsible for the inflammation and hysteria. I judge all writers in the light of this fact—how well have they understood the revolutionary nature of our period. How anti-bourgeois are they? How militant? How proud and forceful? How steady and pitiless is their gaze? The loveliest music in a poet’s ear is that made by outworn systems and convictions when they come crashing to the ground.

Yrs,
Irv

Saturday [March 9, 1957pm]

Dear Des,

Just got the Can Forum with your review of Scott’s The Eye of the Needle.¹ I am as happy with your comments as I was dismayed and disgusted with Hambleton’s² on Critically
Speaking. H’s persnickety blah illustrates the observation that no one hates a radical so much as an ex-radical. I suppose it’s a bad conscience. Add to that the sense of frustration and impotence a tyke like Hamb must have nowadays and his ill-tempered attack, that of a midget against a man, becomes intelligible.

Your review goes to the heart of the matter. You see at a glance F.R.’s service to this country, the purpose of his outspokenness and irony. In a country where there’s so little satire, Frank’s is doubly welcome. I also liked the poems you picked for mention. Keep firing, D.P.

Yours,
Irving

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1Desmond Pacey, rev. of The Eye of the Needle by F.R. Scott, Canadian Forum March 1957: 285-86.


3Ronald Hambleton (b. 1917), poet, scholar and novelist, author of Object and Event (1955), Every Man Is an Island (1959), and Mazo de la Roche of Jalna (1966).

4"Bloodletting may have gone out of fashion as a therapeutic device for the body, but I am sure that the social blood-letting which these poems provide is good medicine for the Canadian soul. Keep firing, F.R."


March 10, 1957

Dear Desmond,

This in some haste. I’m off to give the first of my readings, with high hopes of sales-a-plenty. It’s to the Teacher’s Federation, of whose bulletin I happen to be the editor. The executive committee thought it might be a good idea to bring some live culture to the culturally undernourished teachers and I went along with it, having my own kettle of fish to fry.

Now that Ryerson has sent me the final lot of 100 Binox, I’ve got to hustle to dispose of them before I’m buried under the avalanche of 650 copies I’ve asked Williams to send me as my share of the 2nd edition. It’s going to take a lot of planning & hard work this year before I see the last copy of that batch sold. Well, next week I shall be in Toronto again, for no TV show this time, but to give a reading at the Ryerson Institute. That name has a fine ironical ring, hasn’t it? I ought to unload some Binox there.

At this stage of my life I don’t know whether I’m a poet or one of those despised businessmen (bourgeois) I write so angrily about.
Forgive those intemperate postcards I sent you. Recent events in the ME have made me go sour on lots of things: imagine Israel having to pull out of Gaza & Aquaba without any guarantees. There’s int’l morality for you. What hypocrisy!

What have you decided for Easter? How’s your chapter on Birney coming on? Good luck with it.

Give my warmest love to Mary.

Yours,

Irving

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1. Irving Layton, poetry reading, Montreal Teacher’s Federation of Jewish Schools, 10 March 1957.

2. The Bulletin of the Montreal Teacher’s Federation of Jewish Schools.

3. Ryerson had refused to distribute the book; see 76.1.


5. Despite UN demands in January, Israel refused to withdraw from the Gulf of Aquaba and the Gaza Strip, territories it had won in the Suez incident without assurances of free navigation in Aquaba and without agreement that Gaza would remain in Israeli hands; Israeli forces were withdrawn March 6-7 after assurances of free navigation and Egyptian non-belligerence.

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95. March 12, 1957

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your cards and letters. I hope the poetry reading went off well and that you sold lots of copies.

Things do look most disturbing in the Middle East. If Dulles has tricked Israel into withdrawing & won’t stop Nasser, he should be drawn and quartered.1

Glad you liked the Scott review. I didn’t hear the Hambleton critique, but I heard about it.

The Birney chapter is coming along very slowly. I feel that it is going to be weak. Birney doesn’t excite me at all.

We haven’t made any firm decision about Easter yet, but I think we shall probably come to Montreal for two or three days.

I have reason to believe that some rather nice news will be coming to you soon.2 So cheer up!

By the way, I dreamt about Klein last night. He suddenly turned up at my door, & we had a wonderful talk. I should like to meet the man—he made such a tremendous effort to affirm in the face of chaos.

As ever,

Des P

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1. US Secretary of State John F. Dulles had presented a memorandum to Israel on February 11 urging it to withdraw "promptly and unconditionally" from the Gaza strip.
Dear Irving,

It was a great thrill to hear your voice last night, and just crowned our gaiety following the Red 'n Black.¹ Wish you could have seen that show.

I hope I haven't raised any false hopes by what I said about good news, but unless I have been wrongly informed at least one very nice thing will be coming your way shortly.

I hate to think of you having to buy the Livesay book, but as I was only sent one I cannot give you one. I'll lend you this one, & you can return it when you've digested it. I didn't think an introduction² was the place for detailed critical analysis or appraisal, but simply a means of giving the reader an interest in the book & some background information. Do I succeed?

Will let you know our Easter plans as soon as they are definite. On the whole, don't you think it would be better if we stayed at a hotel? I know that when you have children guests can be a nuisance, & there's such a thing as having too much of a good thing. We'd want to see a lot of you, but whether we should park ourselves in your house...

My book is really well short of being finished. The idea was to use my Northern Review article on Carman³ as his chapter, but the book's scope & seriousness has expanded to the point where I feel I shall have to tackle him freshly and more definitively. Also once all the chapters are written, I want to revise them all in relation to one another, to get an overall unity of effect. F.R. Scott warns me not to rush the job, & I think he's right.⁴ If I can finish it by midsummer I shall be quite happy.

As ever,
Des

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¹The Red 'n Black Revue is an annual presentation by the senior class at the University of New Brunswick which began in 1948 and continues today (red and black are the school colours).

²See 38.5.


⁴F.R. Scott, letter to Desmond Pacey, 25 Feb. 1957, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada. ("No one has ever brought quite so much determination to the task as you. Hold yourself up to the most exacting standards, and don't hurry the work. Reflection is needed....")
fellowship. At this point I can't think straight, so if this sounds crazy to you I ask for your usual indulgence. This is a big thing in my life, and it couldn't have arrived more opportunely. The past two or three years have been especially hard, since my earlier sins had finally caught up with me. I think I've been overdrawn in the bank every single month for the past five years, so if ever you do write an essay on me, don't fail to render proper homage to the bank manager, who must have an unorthodox soft spot in his heart for over-sanguine poets. He's literally kept me and my family alive these many years: odd that I, a dyed-in-the-wool red shd grow so lyrical about bank managers! Ah, well, doesn't Marx speak somewhere about the dialectical union of opposites?

It means I can now bring out my books without a haunted feeling I'm taking something away from Bet and the kids. I'm not exaggerating—it's been as bad as that sometimes. My wife has been everything that a crazy, mixed-up, impulsive, demoniacal poet cd want in a mate. Do you know she's actually insisted I shd bring out my books, even when I showed her the mounting pile of bills? McClelland & Stewart wanted to publish TiBBY in their Indian File series; Bet just wouldn't hear of it; begged me to go ahead with JWms though it meant sinking over $600 which not only we hadn't got but which we couldn't even borrow. Madness!

Well, what is it that Browning says somewhere: "...suddenly the worst turns to the best." And then something, too, he adds about the elements' rage dwindling. Seems to fit our situation perfectly. Still, it's been a lot of fun, even the very anxieties; I know I shall look back to the frenzy and excitement of the past decade with a good deal of nostalgia and regret. Though many days were hungry ones, they were also great days, not one of which I should wish to be blotted out. It's been a full life and a happy one, and I'm thankful to the kind fates who have given me many good things, not the least of which is yours and Mary's friendship. Accept from a full and joyful heart my sincere thanks.

Yrs,
Irv

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1Layton won the 1957 Canada Foundation Award, valued at four thousand dollars.

2Although he studied Marx in the late twenties and in the thirties, and belonged to left-wing groups such as the Young People's Socialist League and the Young Communist League, Layton was never a member of the Communist Party, although he joined the Progressive Party of Canada for one week in 1946.

3Layton is speaking ironically here; the concept of the dialectic, or the union of opposing forces into a higher synthesis, which Marx borrowed from Hegel (who in turn had borrowed it from Kant and the Greek philosophers), is central to Marx's thesis concerning the inevitable operation of historical forces.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave
The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change..."

March 22, 1957
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of March 17. I was of course delighted to hear that my inside information was correct and that you had been selected for a fellowship. Now let’s keep our fingers crossed for the Governor-General's Award for the Improved Binoculars!

There’s not much to report on this end. I’m still plugging away on Birney, but I feel sure it’s going to be one of the less inspired chapters. I’ve been working under high pressure for too long, & am feeling weary. Lectures & essays take so much of my time, & soon there will be scores of exam papers to mark.

Our eldest boy has been selected as one of the Scouts to go to the World Jamboree in England this summer, and as it will cost $400 we are rather afraid we shall have to give up our Easter holiday. So don’t count on seeing us at all at that time, though we are not definite about it yet. As the lad is rather shy, I think it will be a great opportunity for him that we shall simply have to afford somehow.

Mary is to have a one-man exhibition at the Art Centre here in April, which will be good for her morale.

Thanks for the very kind & heartening words at the end of your letter. You richly deserve a year of comparative leisure.

As ever,
Des P

Thursday [March 28, 1957]
Dear Desmond,

The difficulty you’re having with Birney is not in yourself, but in the subject you’ve chosen to write about. Of all the poets of that group he’s the least exciting. The personal note is almost totally lacking in him, and he really has no subject-matter, only abstract convictions. His style has neither the artificial distinction of Smith, nor the movement and vigor of Klein, and since there’s no conflict in him, he cannot muster the rage and hatred, as Scott can, to satirize the conventions he dislikes. He has opinions, but not much depth of feeling. Like Klein and Scott he veers towards moral sentimentalism, that fatal trap of all poets who are not first-rate. Smith’s second-ratedness is of another kind—a want of passion, of energy.
Cushion-flowers. But to get back to E.B. Quite frankly, I do not think he’s a poet, certainly, I can’t think of a single line of his which is memorable, or anything he said which couldn’t be said better in prose. Prose is his medium: swift, plangent, but unsubtle, not for the "third ear". His affectations of Middle English, or what have you, are just that—affectations, and damned irritating at that...Your introduction to Livesay is useful, but you do not convince me she’s a poet either. No one ever is without passion and bewilderment. Thanks for sending the bk. Do come for Easter. I’ll gladly pay yours and Mary’s expenses.

Always,

Irv

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1Layton is alluding to such Birney poems as "Anglo-Saxon Street," (David 14-15) and "Happenounde" (The Strait of Anian 4).

100. Friday March 29, [1957]

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your card.

I can’t quite agree with you about Birney. I think his poetry is much better than his prose, and that when he is at his best (as in "David", "Hands", "Dusk on English Bay", "Vancouver Lights") he is very good indeed. I think I’m gradually getting the hang of him & can do an interesting essay on him—but the real obstacle is not his verse but the fact that I’ve been pushing myself too hard this winter & am browned off.

I’m disappointed by your lack of enthusiasm for the Livesay book. Surely you are wrong in saying she has no passion.

I don’t think I can hold out much hope for Easter. I don’t see how we could justify the expense. We are thinking more seriously now of a trip to Ottawa in June for the meetings of the learned societies.

To revert to Birney, I haven’t actually started writing yet, but I am just about ready to start.

I suppose you are full of plans & projects for your year of leisure. Will you stay in Montreal, or travel?

As ever,

Des P

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1Earle Birney, David and Other Poems (Toronto: Ryerson, 1942) 1, 28, 30, 36.

2Pacey refers to the Canada Council fellowship; Layton continued with his teaching duties.

101.[pc] Saturday [March 30, 1957pm]

Dear Desmond,

Thanks for the spirited defense of Birney which has sent me back to his books to see in him what you do. Admitted, "Hands" and "David" ARE good, but are they superlatively so? I mean, will anyone wish to read them fifty years from now? After all, that’s the only test for
poetry—endurability. Somehow I can’t quite convince myself the mythical reader of the future will much want to take either Birney’s or Livesay’s volume off the shelves, unless he’s doing a research paper on the period. I might be wrong: as you know, I have very strong antipathies, and equally very strong likings. There are poets whom I just can’t see—Graves,\(^1\) for instance, or Empson.\(^2\) Yet both, just now enjoy a high reputation. Livesay is Good Housekeeping\(^3\) verse with a left-wing accent. I can, however, see how you or someone else find Birney a considerable poet. My friend Ls D does too. Me, I’m among the great unwashed! Sorry to hear you’re not coming this way. I’d love wrangling with [you] & flirting with Mary.

Yrs,

Irv

\(^1\)Robert Graves (1895-1985), prolific British poet, and author of the war memoir *Goodbye to All That* (1929), the historical novel *I, Claudius* (1934), and a study of the myth of the muse, *The White Goddess* (1948).

\(^2\)William Empson (1906-1984), British poet and critic, author of *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) and *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935).

\(^3\)American magazine established in 1885 by the Hearst Corporation, covering women’s issues with emphasis on home, family life, food and health.

April 2, 1957

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your Saturday card.

I’m glad that you went back to Birney & found that he wasn’t quite so awful! I’ve been re-reading the novels—and *Turvey*\(^1\) stands up very well, but *Down the Long Table*\(^2\) is a complete flop. Birney’s no good at all when he has to deal with other individuals: he can only manipulate stock characters like the dumb private.

We still may come to Montreal at Easter. I just don’t want you to count on it. It’s six weeks since we heard from the girl who volunteered to keep house, & she may have reneged on us. I don’t think you realize quite what a problem it is for us to get clear of our seven children—it’s not a move to take lightly. That is why I once said that fucking is fun but the results do tie you down!

In any case we’ll let you know as soon as we can. But I think we’d better stay in a hotel if we do come—we don’t want to tie you down, & we should be in the centre of the city so that we can make the most of the limited time we shall have for visiting art galleries etc. Mary will want to spend a lot of time in the Spring Show of the Museum of Fine Arts, & I have some checking to do at McGill.

For what it is worth, here are Lorne Pierce’s comments on my Scott & Klein chapters, enclosed in a letter received today\(^3\): “Your chapter on Scott is the best thing I have seen. It is excellent. Nobody is doing anything of this
sort better than you in Canada at the present time...The Klein studies are a much more difficult undertaking, and I would place it among the best things you have ever written. He is an exceedingly difficult & highly complicated writer to capture, but I think you have succeeded.

I told A.J.M. Smith this morning that I thought your book would be one of the most important things of its kind to appear in Canadian literary criticism."

Well, Lorne is very given to quick enthusiasms, but at least it is nice that my publisher has faith in my book. I wish I had quite as much--just now I feel very depressed, as if I would never have a new idea again. I hope it is temporary--the result of a long term, the extra pressure of this book, & a severe cold that I contracted over the weekend.

But I’d appreciate it if you wouldn’t come down on me like a ton of bricks again for a while.

How are your plans coming for next year? I trust you have all sorts of exciting irons in the fire.

By the way, I did appreciate your offer to pay our expenses--& here you are with an overdraft at the bank! No, we aren’t too hard up, & can scrape up the money all right.

Well, you’re a generous spirit and a good friend.

Mary sends her love. She’d love to flirt with you. She’s feeling extra skittish at the moment--spring & all that. That’s partly why I feel exhausted! The pace is too terrific even for Pacey!

As ever,
Des


2 Birney, Down the Long Table (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1955).

3 Lorne Pierce, letter to Desmond Pacey, 24 Mar. 1957, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

103.[pc] Tuesday [April 2, 1957] pm
Dear Desmond,

The weather has been kind to us--sunny, for March, surprisingly warm--and I’ve been exploring the slopes of Mt Royal with a volume of Paradise Lost in my hand. Milton, there’s a poet that takes my head off. What power! A manly poet, before whom the best of our time seem self-indulgent, fragmentary, weak.

"They are but broken lights of thee"1

Did I tell you we got ourselves a TV set last week? It was the only way I cd keep my son at home--I used to see less of him than my neighbours. For me, the novelty has all but worn off. Some good things, of course, but they can’t replace the novels, poems, histories and philosophy on my shelves. If someone wants to settle down into a cheerful mediocrity, TV’s for him. More and more, people are likely
to judge from this single devastating angle—do they entertain—do they amuse? Already, the teachers are having to compete with Bob Hope & Jackie Gleason. In the age of grinning idiocy, which is swiftly descending on us, what chance is there for Milton, Dante, and the other "dark" sage-poets? None, I fear. All of us are spitting against the wind.

Yrs,
Irv


104.[pc] Wednesday [April 10, 1957pm]
Dear Desmond,

I wanted to answer your very welcome letter with one of my own, but: TRADE UNION matters. Negotiations for a new salary scale for the teachers open the end of this month, and I've been chosen to act as chairman for the Teacher's Committee. We called a general meeting this Monday to learn what grievances there were (board revelations of previous contract) and tomorrow evening the negotiating committee will meet to plan strategy for its biennial wrestling bout with the Executive--heap Big Shots, plenty ignorant. I tangled with them several years ago; the experience all but shattered my faith in the future of education. My poem "Apeswatch" you'll find it in the BP--gives you my feelings on that occasion.

Scott is bringing the French poet, Pierre Emmanuel, to my party, Sat, April 20th...Can you be here for then? Don't worry, I won't press my impulsive request upon you and Mary. Of course, it's more sensible for you to be in the centre of the city. All of us here wd be glad to see you. Try to make it.

Aff'ly yrs,
Irv

1Layton had represented the teachers in negotiations with the school board in 1953.
3Noel Jean Mathieu (pseud. Pierre Emmanuel; 1916—84), French poet, journalist and educator, author of Tombeau d'Orphée (1941), Babel (1951), and Jacob (1970).

105.[pc] April 11, 1957
Dear Desmond,

I'm delighted with your feeling of success with the Klein chapter. You've made me very curious to see it, so I
hope you’ll bring it down with you if & when you come to Montreal. I share L.P.’s enthusiasm for your work—in advance. For quite a time now, it has been clear to me you’re the only one in this country who has the necessary insight and interest to do the job of evaluating its literature. You’ve got the scrupulosities of the scholar and the creative imagination of the writer; this puts you in a class by yourself. When you go off the deep end, it isn’t, thank Heavens, for a want of enthusiasm. Damn it, you actually like poetry! That, too, almost puts you in a class by yourself.

Yesterday I rec’d $21.50 with another $15.00 coming to me from the BBC for two poems they took for their broadcast Commonwealth Poetry. The two poems are "Now That I’m Older" and "The Bull Calf".¹ In the same mail I got an order from the Ryerson Institute of Technology for all my recent books, which added up to a sizeable chunk of money—$15.50—who says poetry doesn’t pay? Of course it does, but like crime, it doesn’t pay enough! Have finished recently a good biography of Burns² and an excellent book by Bowra, The Romantic Imagination.³ Before me on the table lies Horton’s biography of Hart Crane.⁴ Terrific! Life is good—books, love, spring weather and friends like you and Mary.

Aff’ly,
Irv


106. Friday [April 12, 1957]

Dear Oiving,

Thanks for your two cards.

Glad to know about the BBC—and liked all the compliments. Yum!

I’ve finished Birney & think it is good—far better than I hoped. But now I’ve decided the Carman chapter (based on an article I did in Northern Review about 1950)¹ is away below the rest in quality, so I have to re-do it completely, before starting a general revision of the whole book. But I’m scared to show the chapters to you at this stage—it’d be like baring my breasts to Marilyn Monroe!

The housekeeper has again volunteered & present plans call for Mary & me to leave here Tuesday evening April 23 & arrive Mtl Wed, & leave Mtl Friday evening. Will let you know definitely later.

¹Irv
Mary's one-man exhibition's a great success—upwards of 100 at the formal opening Mon night, & four sales. Up & at 'em!

Love,
Des & Mary

1See 96.3.

107. [April 15–20, 1957]
Dear Irving,
We have now made definite plans to arrive in Montreal by train on the morning of Wednesday April 24, & to leave Friday evening.
Shall look forward to seeing you.

As ever,
Des P

108.[pc] April 21, 1957
Dear Desmond & Mary,
I'm delighted to hear you're making it to Montreal. We'd like to arrange a party of some kind for Thursday evening: I do hope you've not got anything on for then. Frank Scott will be here, and perhaps Al Purdy & Eli Mandel. I met Pierre Emmanuel yesterday afternoon at Frank's house and we just abt fell into each other's arms when I learned that he too had a metaphysics of the manure heap--had just written a poem abt it, which he read to the assemblage. He insists upon dedicating the poem to me; quite a transatlantic romance, nothing like it since Kelly became Queenie.¹

Aff'ly,
Irv

¹American actress Grace Kelly married Prince Rainier, sovereign of Monaco, in Monaco's Cathedral of Saint Nicholas on April 19, 1956.

109. April 28, [1957]
Dear Irving & Betty,
Mary & I got home on Saturday to find the children all in fine fettle. The housekeeper reported that they had all been very good & helpful.
We had a wonderful holiday in Montreal, & are very grateful to you for your warm-hearted hospitality. Those going-away presents were the crowning touch--so totally unexpected & undeserved, & yet so appropriate & pleasing!
Now I'm in the thick of marking exams & yearning for the day when I can get at my book again. Birney has written with many suggestions re his chapter, but general approval for my approach to his work.¹
It was certainly good to see you both again.

Love, Des
April 29, 1957

Dear Desmond,

The Russians are still in Hungary,¹ and stronger than ever, as I said they wd be, and the western world is up an oil spout in the Middle East for funkng the Suez Affair. America’s adoption of the Eisenhower Doctrine² for that part of the world is her penance for lining up with Russia against her own allies. As for the British Labour Party, its leaders let sentimental anti-imperialist or party advantage rob them of whatever little common sense they possessed.³ More than ever, recent events have confirmed the positions I took at the time of the Hungarian and Suez crises.

Hurrah for me!

So by yr leave, some more uninhibited reflections on your Klein chapter.

First of all, it seems to me you can do a lot of cutting and bolt tightening. Some points you made are repetitious; like daisies in May, "exuberant" or its noun appear all over the place, again and again you point up Klein’s "wit", "affirmativeness", etc etc. It’s the way you’ve approached your task that’s queerred your pitch here. Your essay wears a "chronicle" air because the critic and the scholar have put in rival claims between which you are unable to choose. So you’re dragged now this way, now that; what results is a series of book reviews tacked together with only the grim spittle of resolve to hold them. Your method is to put the book or the poem on a morgue slab, put an identification tag on the corpse, and say a prayer. I’d like to see more brave generalizations—what kind of Jewish poet is he? What’s his relationship to contemporary American and British poetry? What is his central disorder? --after all, it’s for your insights that you will be remembered and praised, not your industry in amassing details, however numerous or obscure.

Your book, when finished, ought to illuminate many aspects of our national life. To do that, it ought to be built around some central thesis, ie the poet’s relation to the dominant value of his times, the failure of Cndn poets to develop; or even the influence of British and Am poetry on our own; or all three and a couple of more thrown in for additional weight and substance. Some angle is wanted here: look at the way Frye’s notion of the "frozen and bleak northness"⁴ has fluttered the academic dovecotes, though there’s damned little in it. But that’s nothing. What a concept does is to marshall a body of facts and march them up into the reader’s mind. What in the hell is literary criticism but a lot of plausibilites. Perhaps that’s all that poetry is, too.
All this doesn’t gainsay what I said to you when you were here. Your chapters on Klein and Sangster are the best things that have been done on them. Take it that I’m hard to please, or have a bug in my head; for all that, however, I think my cantankerousness more helpful to you than superficial praise or agreement. From my own experience, the severest critics have been my best ones, the ones I always sought out. But to hell with apologizing. When it comes to poetry, or writing abt it, you must think of me as a bull terrier at the seat of your pants.

It was great seeing you and Mary. All my love to her.

Yours, as ever,
Irv

1 Despite United Nations insistence (in November and December 1956 and January 1957) the Soviet Union refused to withdraw its forces from Hungary; in January the UN’s Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold proposed a fact-finding committee to study Soviet intervention in Hungary, but the Soviet-controlled puppet government of Kadar barred UN observers from entering the country.

2 The "Eisenhower Doctrine" was formally embodied in a resolution submitted to Congress on January 5, 1957, in which the President asked for authorization "to undertake economic and military co-operation with nations in the general area of the Middle East in order to assist in the strengthening and defence of their independence." The United States had joined the Soviet Union in harshly criticizing the deployment of troops by Britain and France in the Suez.

3 The British Labour Party under Gaitskell had violently opposed the deployment of troops in the Suez affair.

4 Layton is here not quoting Frye directly but rather paraphrasing various of his early remarks on the Canadian imagination, such as, from 1943:

   The immediate source of this is obviously the frightening loneliness of a huge and thinly settled country. When all the intelligence, morality, reverence and simian cunning of man confronts a sphinx-like riddle of the indefinite like the Canadian winter, the man seems as helpless as a trapped mink and as lonely as a loon....In Wilfred Campbell, for instance, the Canadian winter expands into a kind of frozen hell of utter moral nihilism...Nature is consistently sinister and menacing in Canadian poetry.


And here is Frye making a similar point in 1946:

   In certain Old English poems, notably "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer," there is a feeling which seems to a modern reader more Canadian than English: a feeling of the melancholy of a thinly-settled country under a bleak northern sky, of the terrible isolation of the creative mind in such a country, of resigning oneself to hardship and loneliness as the only means of attaining, if not serenity, at least a kind of rigid calm.(146)


111. May 6, 1957

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of April 29. I’ve been so busy marking exams since I got back here that I haven’t had a moment to think about the book. But I
think all that you say about the limitations of the Klein chapter is perfectly true, & I'll do my best to remedy it. However I think many of the points you make are my limitations. I've often told Frye that my mind is like a sledge-hammer whereas his is like a rapier. I have energy & industry & brevity & accuracy, but I have not Frye's brilliance. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, and there's no use in pretending to be the brilliant guy who can find the magic answer to the problems of Cdn poetry. Each of my chapters will be an honest attempt to sum up the strengths & weaknesses of a given poet, but the book as a whole, though it will have cross-references, will not have a central thesis. I didn't plan it that way, & I couldn't impose a thesis on it now without completely re-writing it. It will be a rather loose collection of essays, & that is a weakness which I shall just have to concede.

Mary loves the earrings & brooch, and has worn them at every available do since we got back.

Love,
Des P

112. May 14, 1957
Dear Desmond,
I haven't been able to write you, for the June exams are almost upon us and I've been much occupied in lessening the nailbiting anxieties of my five matriculants. This is a trying time for them and for the school. Since this is our first matriculating class, so much depends upon the record they make: if one or two should fail it might mean retrenchment, retreat, going back to junior grades, with some of the teachers--not me, but the additional ones who were taken on when the school decided to expand--out on their ear, looking for positions elsewhere. The last two nights I spent setting papers in Composition and History--worked on the latter for more than two hours. I've still another paper in English Literature to prepare, but that can wait until tomorrow.

I suppose you're in the middle of a lot of paperwork yourself. Neck high--or is it deep? Last week Ls Dudek brought along the exam books for his course in Candn poetry--the reams & reams students write, most of it so callously dull and unoriginal. Thinking of his having to plough through that unappetizing lot, I began to feel sorry for him until I reflected that his holidays would begin as soon as he's finished--the lucky stiff! No summer school for him either. He's rented a cottage in Ste Agathe, sixty miles north of Montreal, where his wife² will join him for three months so that she can complete her doctoral thesis. We might take a place not too far away from them, though don't bank on that either, since to date we've made a hundred different plans and thrown them away. About all that we've settled is that Mexico is definitely out. Not
safe for the children, we’ve learned; too many viruses about, water not safe for drinking, etc.

Phyllis Webb is back in Montreal. She phoned us last night, happy as a kitten that she’s been taken in from the rain. She found Victoria depressing; intellectually, futilitarian. I’m very happy she’s decided to return. She’s a complex woman with many strange depths. Also she’s one of the few women of my acquaintance without pettiness or malice. Loyal and intelligent. If I didn’t love my wife and she didn’t love someone else—who knows. Nah, that’s just for a story: actually my nature is too blunt and tactless for her. Vide my poem. We’ve come a distance from the antipathy with which our first meeting began to our present mutual regard. She has a subtle mind—I like that in a woman. Her body? Heavenly, no doubt; but my pleasures these nights all run to Tacitus, Trigonometry, and Trade Union forays. How’s that for alliteration?

My good friend, I have a much higher opinion of your abilities than you do. With a little effort—ambition?—you can make your book a landmark in Canadian criticism. It’s the approach—too modest!—not the sensibility or intelligence that’s at fault.

All our love to you all,
Irving

PS The Union won!

enclosure: Ted Abrams, "$4,000 Award Real Windfall As Poet Faces Printer’s Bills” NDG (Montreal) Herald, 11 May 1957.

1Dudek joined the English department at McGill in 1951.

2Stephanie (Zuperko) Dudek, psychologist, married Dudek in 1943; they divorced in 1965.

3Phyllis Webb had been based in Montreal since 1950, returning to her native Victoria briefly in 1957.

4“For Phyllis, Who Snatched Her Criticized Poem in Anger;” see 14.4.

May 24, 1957
Dear Desmond,

My heartiest congrats to Mary!

Bet and I were delighted to get Mary’s warm letter. Bet will be answering it one of these days—as soon as she comes out of the flurry of creativity which has assailed her the last few weeks. At last she seems to be finding her stride; where she goes, few will be able to overtake her. Of that I’m quite sure. Now that she has fewer household chores, she can give more time and energy to painting; furthermore, the money from the fellowship will enable her to visit more frequently the Art Galleries in New York and Boston, as well as meet the painters there who are up and doing. More glad I am for her sake than my own to have snatched that CF purse—–which I now must regard as a
consolation prize for not winning the gee gee medal.\footnote{Governor-General’s Award; see 82.1.} May I have many more such consolation prizes! Last weekend, we went up with Louis the Dudek to look for a summer cottage. On the way back I had three flats—must be something of a record, I think!

I go on \textit{Fighting Words} again this coming Sunday.\footnote{\textit{Fighting Words}, CBC Television, 28 May 1957, (Moderator Nathan Cohen; panelists Irving Layton, Charlotte Whitton, Ted Jolliffe and Dr. Daniel Cappon.)} With Charlotte Whitton\footnote{Charlotte Whitton (1896-1975), social worker, politician, and flamboyant Mayor of Ottawa (Canada’s first woman mayor) from 1951 to 1964.} as one of the panelists. 

Vivas,
Irv

\footnote{Fugitive.}

\footnote{Layton won a 1957 Canada Council Senior Fellowship—funds to support a year of writing.}

\footnote{May 27, 1957

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter, book, magazine, and postcard.\footnote{May 27, 1957} I hope you’ll forgive me if I’m very brief. The fact is that I am still bogged down in this book of criticism, & have been working like a dog ever since I got back from Montreal. The first two or three weeks were full of exams—both setting and marking—and then all the fol-de-rol of convocation & honorary degrees (Pratt, Mason Wade, Sidney Smith).\footnote{I arranged a poetry reading for Pratt, introduced him, entertained him during his stay, & generally was in charge of him—a pleasant but time-consuming job. I was shocked to find how he has failed physically & mentally—quite frail, and very forgetful. But still a prince among men, & he read magnificently. We must get you down here for a reading sometime.} I arranged a poetry reading for Pratt, introduced him, entertained him during his stay, & generally was in charge of him—a pleasant but time-consuming job. I was shocked to find how he has failed physically & mentally—quite frail, and very forgetful. But still a prince among men, & he read magnificently. We must get you down here for a reading sometime.}

Now for the book. I have completely re-written the Sangster, incorporating the new material I got in Montreal, & that chapter has now come alive & is really exciting I think. At least it is now a real contribution to knowledge, if not to criticism. I’ve re-read the Roberts, made a few minor changes, but feel it is good. The D.C. Scott chapter is fine as is. The Lampman I don’t like, & think I must completely re-write. It seemed good when I wrote it two years ago, but it can’t match the others now. The Carman I have yet to write, but should start writing tomorrow. It should be good, as I have masses of material & can certainly be original re biography—& I hope also re critique. The Pratt chapter is brilliant—I don’t know how I did it!—it is far above my usual level of pedestrian exposition, & should in itself make the book worthwhile. The Smith I have
completely revised, & though it’s not as good as Pratt it is good. The F.R. Scott I have also completely revised, & though it’s a bit heavy-handed it is also good. I’ve revised the Klein in the light of your remarks, & it’s now as good as I can make it. I’ve revised the Birney, & it’s good too. So that really leaves Lampman to revise & Carman to write. Now that wouldn’t be much of a chore if I had all summer—but the fact is Mary & I leave for Ottawa for conferences on June 8, & I feel I must have the book done by then if at all possible. So the old Pacey energy will have to be forthcoming or else!

By the way, we plan to drive to Ottawa, & will pass through Mtl either on the way to (on the 9th) or on the way from (on the 17th) Ottawa, or perhaps both. Will let you know for sure, so we can have a meal together on route. We’ll have the two small (2 & 4 yr old) kids with us.

Pinsky wants Mary to take some of her paintings to Steegenan (?) on the way through, with a view to a show in Gallery 12 (?) at the museum. By the way, she’ll be greatly disappointed if you don’t go to see her painting at The International Council of Women’s conference at McGill (Physics bldg, I believe) June 5 to 15.

Delighted to hear Betty is working so well. Shall look for you on Fighting Words.

Love,

Des

1Pacey is referring to the second edition of The Improved Binoculars; the magazine he refers to may be the Bulletin of the Montreal Jewish Teacher’s Association, which Layton currently edited—he later mentions sending Pacey one or two issues of it (see 164).

2UWB awarded honorary degrees to E.J. Pratt (Doctor of Letters), Mason Wade and Sidney Smith (both Doctor of Laws) at its Encaenia on 16 May 1957.

3E.J. Pratt, poetry reading, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, 15 May 1957.

4Pacey studied under Pratt as an undergraduate at Victoria College, University of Toronto 1934-38.

5The annual meetings of the Learned Societies were held 10-12 June 1957 at the University of Ottawa.

6Alfred Pinsky (b. 1921), Montreal artist, Chairman, Department of Fine Arts at Sir George Williams, Professor of Fine Arts at Concordia; Pinsky taught summer courses in art at the University of New Brunswick 1953-60.

7Unidentified.

June 4, 1957
Dear Irving,

Just a note to thank you for the new edition, which looks most attractive & should sell like hot-cakes, and to tell you that I have finished my book. The Carman chapter is perhaps too long, but it is one of the best. I have thoroughly revised the Lampman chapter, and although I still have qualms about it Fred says it is excellent.

I feel exhausted now--have never pushed myself quite so hard as during these last three weeks. But it's been exhilarating too.

Mary & I expect to be going through Montreal on June 9 about 2 pm on our way up to Ottawa, and on June 17 about 12 noon on our way back. We leave here this Saturday morning. If you want to get in touch with us in Ottawa, our address there is c/o H.L. Carson, 1 572 Mansfield Ave.

Love,
Des

1 Holford Laverne Carson (1888-1977), Mary Pacey's father.

June 10, 1957
Dear Desmond,

Well, here I am in a tavern on Park Ave, cooling off before a revolving fan after taking a sunbath in nearby Fletcher's Field. I was not able to write before this, for these are the last days of school--exams, etc. Bet and I are still undecided about where we're going to blister & peel this summer; maybe we'll rent a cottage in Louis' vicinity. I'd like a quiet place, so that I can get down to some real hard work. Have been re-reading Jane Austen; just finished Sense & Sensibility. I'd like to see someone do a psychoanalytical study of her heroes and heroines. Are you and Frye giving papers in Ottawa? If yes, what on? I might be tempted to motor up. In any case, I'd like to see you and Mary on your way there. Will there be time between trains? Bet and I are very eagerly looking forward to seeing Mary's work.

All our love to you all,
Irv

1 Fletcher's Field is a park at the foot of Mount Royal on Esplanade in downtown Montreal.

2 Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility (London: T. Egerton, 1811).

June 16, 1957
Dear Desmond,

I've just finished a poem, "Once and For All" which says all that I have to say about professors and poets. But you won't like it, so I've put it aside for posthumous publication. Why do profs so invariably miss the real thing? They remind me of children playing Pin the Donkey's
Tail. Blindfolded, stumbling, and 0 so pathetically in earnest, knowing that the donkey is somewhere out there, and the tail is in their hands. All they need do is stretch out their hands and find the donkey’s rear. But they never succeed in pinning the tail where it belongs, but only where, in their blindness, they think it should. So one gets the grotesque picture of a tail pinned to an ear, or a nose, or depending from an eye.

Academic life is artificial and sterile. Above all, it’s respectable, and professors go in fear and trembling they might lose their security through some scandal or the rumour of scandal. Imagine what wd happen if Cogswell were discovered in Mary’s bed! It couldn’t happen, of course. But now if there were a real, unattached poet about... A Pushkin, a Heine or Villon. But don’t get alarmed. Though they wd certainly try conclusions, Mary’s virtue wd stand firm against all their devilish rhymes.

My point is that academic life is inhibiting and this to a poet is fatal. He must immerse himself daily in the fresh stream of living experience. He must be free to say and do anything he pleases. He must be free to be outrageously stupid, peacock vain, violently drunk and strikingly offensive. All these are forgiven him, so long as he writes poetry, as the sheep’s gut is forgotten in the violin concerto. Take Mayakovksky, that magnificent Russian giant, roaring drunk and shouting his impieties; Hart Crane, Yessenin. Can you imagine any one of them leading the tidy, respectable life of a professor in a small academic town like Kingston, or Fredericton? Worried about schedules, faculty meetings, college boards, and the pinheads who have wandered into the course, and will as listlessly find their way out of it again. I can imagine the smirk Crane wd make as he pranced about naked to the consternation of the students come to be tailored into proper ladies and gentlemen; and of the learned man who had just completed the definitive work on him.

No, it won’t do. The two species are poles distant. Poets live, and the professors speculate on life. All right, and no damage done, so long as the two are not confused, and the professors know their limitations and their place. And I might add, the poets their’s. I’ve written all this, set off by Galloway’s² visit. I surmise he’s come through a great deal—a bad tick, and swollen finger-ends. Was he captured and tortured by the Nazis?—but after nine years in Fredericton, all that Shakespeare means to him are beautiful sounds which, he assures me, are peerless and inimitable. How you’ve contrived to stay alert and creative, unsettles me by its unusualness.

All the best,
Irving

¹Layton refers to an unpublished poem (or he may simply be pulling Pacey’s leg).
Tuesday [June 18, 1957pm]

Dear Desmond,

I thought you wd call in yesterday and I stayed indoors most of the afternoon. Too bad I missed you & Mary this trip. How was the Conference? Sticky with the heat and dull? That was D. Galloway's impression who, with Pinsky came to see me yesterday. Galloway and I got into a wrangle about Shakespeare and I was pleasantly surprised that he knew almost as much about the subject as I did. He also insisted that Shakes was just the greatest ever, which while it was not an entirely original observation, indicated that his heart is in the right place and that he has a commendable enthusiasm for poetry, or rather, to be more accurate for certain hypnosis Producing sounds which he calls poetry. It would surprise me a great deal if he were able to analyze intelligently, with a view to appreciation, a poem of Auden's or Yeats'. But then they have the misfortune to have lived and written in the 20th C instead of the 17th. Professors! Books. Abstractions, obsessions, phobias, pretentiousness--in a final word, FUNK--fear of real living and experiencing. HUMBUG!

Yrs,
Irv
June 20, [1957]

Dear Irving,

Just a hasty note to say that we reached Montreal about 11:30 Monday morning & thought you would be busy at school so didn’t phone. It was terribly hot anyway & the children were fretful, so we just kept going.

Had a good time in Ottawa--good chats with Birney, Jay Macpherson, F.R. Scott, Daniells, Frye, Millar MacLure\(^1\) etc.

Did you see Mary’s painting?
Will write again soon.

Love,
Des

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1 Willar MacLure (1917–1990), Professor of English at the University of Toronto 1953–77, author of *George Chapman: A Critical Study* (1966), and editor of *Marlowe, the Critical Heritage* (1979).

June 22, 1957

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter, which I enjoyed reading even though I think most of it is bunk. Mary, however, says that I am to tell you that she approves of the letter and that you seem to have reacted to Galloway much as she does.

You obviously didn’t like Galloway. I occasionally have doubts about him, but on the whole I like him. He is terribly shy & insecure--perhaps because of going through some very tough fighting at Cassino\(^1\) (where he won the Military Cross) but more likely because of some trouble in his family background (he often speaks of his mother, but has never even referred to his father). He’s not the dry-as-dust scholar you seem to think, but has written some good short stories & is currently writing a novel. I know some professors who are the antiquarians you describe, but I don’t think David is among them.

When I say your letter is mostly bunk I mean that it is silly to say that all professors are respectable and all poets are rips. Professors as a class are not more but rather less respectable & conventional than stock-brokers, undertakers, lawyers, doctors, or ditchdiggers. And not all poets are rips by any means--vide Chaucer, Milton, Wordsworth, Arnold, & Eliot. And professors are sometimes poets--vide E.J. Pratt\(^2\), Louis Macneice\(^3\), Karl Shapiro,\(^4\) A.J.M. Smith\(^5\) etc.

Well, you let off some steam, & that’s always good for the soul. And the references to other people going to bed with Mary induced us to go to bed together last night with extra enthusiasm & delightful consequences! As the Frenchman said, "What I most like about England is the good old English proverb, early to bed & up with the cock!"

Keep your pecker up & keep that smooth unwrinkled member polished!

Love,
Des
Town one hundred and forty-nine kilometres southeast of Rome, where British, French, Polish and American troops were engaged against the Germans in the early months of 1944; fighting reached a climax during May 11–20.

E.J. Pratt taught at Victoria College, University of Toronto from 1907–53.

Louis MacNeice (1907–63), British poet and radio dramatist associated with the Auden group, worked for the BBC from 1941 until his death.

Karl Shapiro (b. 1913), American poet and essayist, became an Associate Professor at Johns Hopkins University in 1948 and a Professor at the University of Nebraska in 1956.


June 29, 1957
Dear Desmond,
I don’t wish to start the battle of the century--the drips vs the rips, so I’ll concede right off the distinction is an untenable one. There have been drips who were also rips, and vice versa. Of course, there’s no telling how or where the poetic lightning is going to strike; like that of all other talents, its turn-up is absolutely democratic. But the real point I was trying to make with admittedly a deal of solemn nonsense was that the academic life, since it’s an artificial one, is simply not for the creator. I think a whole generation of promising poets has been swallowed up or stunted by having taken jobs in the universities & colleges. Their effete rhymes lie strewn all over the place, sad reminders of their earlier brilliance. I saw Birney in Toronto last Sunday when I was there for another Fighting Words program: didn’t seem too happy. Says he’s loaded down with meetings and paperwork. We had some good sessions together. I had brought along Leonard Cohen and the three of us collected Jay Macpherson and lighted on Anne Wilkinson’s doorstep. She had a plentiful supply of drinks and though the talk was not scintillating, it was adequate. The bombshell I drop’t in their midst was the news of Delta, another Montreal "little mag", the successor to Civ/n. Louis has bought a hand press, installed it in his cellar, and the two of us are going to operate it. The first issue ought to be out sometime in early October. What we want is good, lively criticism, poems, and articles. The thing will have 28 or 32 pages.

While I was in Toronto, I also met E.J. Pratt. Earle arranged for Leonard and me to have lunch with the two of them, and a very pleasant lunch it was indeed. Pratt’s full of anecdotes, though I think the humour of an earlier vintage. I liked the clear grey and twinkle of his eye, and the man’s affability and good will take you right into the centre of him. I asked him what he thought of Sutherland’s book; his dentures broke into a satirical grin, and for the
following five minutes he entertained us, and himself too, I thought, by fancying a minister in the pulpit talking of "Christ, the octopus." It was a good show. There's something very boyish about him, quite in contrast to the sad Duke of Windsor face of Birney. All-in-all, it was the most enjoyable weekend I'd ever spent in Toronto. When Leonard and I motored back we had lots of impressions to compare and analyze. We haven't stopped talking about it yet.

So your book is done. Hurrah! You must be a changed man with that load off your mind. It ought to be a good book if a) you've avoided abstract, generalizing criticism; b) offered at least one or two novel insights into each writer's work; c) enabled the reader to see some kind of pattern or continuity in the development of Canadian poetry. Don't be hurried into publishing. This book can put you right out there in front as this country's foremost critic and literary historian.

Tell Mary I'm ready to shoot myself. Because I'm an amnesiacal jackass, I mixed up the dates for the showing and we came one day after the pictures were taken down. I'm griefstricken and so is Betty. Tell DG7 to read The Shakespearean Moment8 by Cruttwell.

Love,
Irving

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2Earle Birney taught in the English department at the University of British Columbia 1946-65.

3Delta, a literary magazine featuring poetry, articles and criticism, was founded and edited by Louis Dudek in Montreal 1957-66 (numbers 1-26).

4ci/n was a Montreal literary magazine 1953-55 (the first five issues were mimeographed; the final two were printed), founded by Dudek and Layton and edited by Aileen Collins.

5Apparently at this early stage Delta was to be a co-operative effort, but the periodical, when it appeared, was edited by Dudek alone; see 127: "As I wrote you, or think I did, Ls is running the whole show, this is his own baby."


7David Galloway.

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your most recent letter.

Sorry you missed seeing Mary's painting. I think you would have liked it, at any rate it is one of my favourites, and it is a very direct expression of her personality. She is looking forward to starting work with Alfie Pinsky again tonight at the Summer School class.

Glad you had such a good time in Toronto. We missed the Fighting Words programme. Who else was on it, & was it lively? My son Philip saw some of it, & said he missed the quotation but gathered you were discussing Grove. I'm glad you met Pratt: he is everything that you say, and has a kind of oak-like honesty and openness that wins you at once. I do think, though, that Brown is right in suggesting that there is a mystery about Pratt: that behind the openness there is something secretive, enigmatic. But perhaps it's just that we can't bring ourselves to believe that anyone could have the translucent honesty that he seems to have. But I do know that he is a man who has suffered, & that his cheerfulness is a triumph of the human will over disaster.

Birney as you say is a tired & disspirited man. He yearned for literary & especially poetic greatness, & having failed to achieve it he now says all Canadian poetry is finished. The talk about lectures & committees & exam papers is a lot of hokum--he's trying to excuse his own failure. Pratt boasts that he never went to a single committee meeting during his thirty-odd years at U of T & no-one has to go. No, Birney, as I clearly imply in my chapter on him, has had it, he's washed up.

So you're to have a new magazine. The more the merrier. Can you cut me in for a book review? What sort of line are you going to take? For goodness' sake give it more character than the pallid Tamarack Review, which seems to me just an inferior version of an academic quarterly.

I've just finished the bibliography for Ten Canadian Poets, & am now in the thick of Summer School lectures. Had my first class in Creative Writing yesterday afternoon, & have my first class in Canadian Literature this afternoon. We have about eight hundred students on the campus, & the place is buzzing. They're practically all teachers, & some of them are very interesting.

Let me know if you go away for the summer, so that I shall know where to write to you. Have you abandoned the prospect of taking a jaunt this way? We'd love to see you.

I honestly think you are barking up a wrong tree about professors being necessarily uncreative. What is more artificial about teaching young people than working in a bank, like Sinclair Ross, or in an insurance office, like Wallace Stevens, or in a publishing house, like T.S. Eliot?

For God's sake write some more poetry. If you quit, the fat will be in the fire. I want your next letter to contain at least two new poems, full of that joie de vivre which is your unique note in Canadian poetry. I'm fed up
with these pallid little intellectual puzzles that the other people produce—give us some blood and guts.

You didn’t rise to the challenge of my penistic references at the close of my last letter. Don’t tell me that you have become respectable now that you’re a Canadian Foundation Fellow. Have you heard about the priest who slapped the nun on the bum, & was told by his superiors that it was alright as long as he didn’t get into the habit?

Remember our motto, borrowed from Yeats—"Bitter & gay, that is the heroic mood!"7

As ever,
Des P

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1E.K. Brown (1905-51), Professor of English (at Toronto, Manitoba and Chicago), and critic, author of the pioneering On Canadian Poetry (1943) and annual surveys of poetry in the University of Toronto Quarterly (1936-50).

2Pacey refers to Brown’s comment:
...in 'The Cachalot' there was another Pratt, a very secretive being who had contrived to lead an impenetrable life behind the front of the most expansive of Canadian poets (153-4)....to the unreflecting he may too often seem just one of the boys, but the reflecting know that only the outer rings of the man are penetrable, and that at the core is a secret life, the life of one who is not lonely because he is self-sufficient. (164) E.K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry (Toronto: Ryerson, 1943).

3Pacey may be thinking of Pratt’s period of depression and religious questioning following the death of his mother Fanny Knight Pratt on 20 December 1926.


5Pacey reflects on Birney’s development in Ten Canadian Poets:
If Birney had maintained his usual rate of publication we might have expected Trial of a City to have been followed by a fifth volume of verse in 1956 or 1957. But so far none has appeared, and if we may judge from the paucity of his poems in the magazines since 1952, and from various of his public utterances on the state of Canadian poetry, it would seem that none is likely to appear.(325)

Desmond Pacey, Ten Canadian Poets.

6Sinclair Ross (b. 1908), Canadian novelist (As For Me and My House 1941) and short story writer (The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories 1968), worked for the Union Bank of Canada (later taken over by the Royal Bank of Canada) from 1924-68.

Wallace Stevens (1879-1955), American poet, joined the legal staff of Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company in 1916, becoming a vice-president of the company in 1934.

T.S. Eliot began working at the London publishing firm of Faber & Gwyer (later Faber & Faber) in 1925, remaining as a director of the firm until his death in 1965.

7See 7.1.4.
Dear Desmond,

Two days ago Bet and I wandered into an unpretentious Art Shop on Sherbrooke Street, our attention caught by some drawings we saw displayed in the window. They were by a Natasha Wrangel,¹ whose husband, now a chemical engineer in Sorel, Que, is related to the unlucky Baron Wrangel², the White Russian the Bolsheviks erased from their steppes.

Inside there were lots of paintings and drawings, Byzantine streaked with le Chinois, all very skillfully executed, especially those for which her children had sat as models, very melancholy and very Russian. After a while, the repetitiveness told against the artist, the unvarying softness of the unvarying curved line, and for all the apparent richness and variety, a deadly sameness of emotion, sweet and denying like certain plants that grow in cemeteries. The woman who ran the shop was more interesting. She was a small, dark, intense woman with very large black eyes that looked at you searchingly, and quick dashing movements as if she were trying to surprise you by coming up at your side or behind you. She told me her husband was an archaeologist and that she accompanied him on all his field trips, assisting him in his excavations—that explained her quick movements and searching glance. She had been to Egypt, Greece, Africa, Iraq; some of the things she and her husband found were on display—beautiful Greek vases dating back to Achilles and Hector, ceremonial urns, and African masks, severe and impassive, not frightening at all. When I told Mrs Vincent my wife was a painter and I a poet, she became so excited I thought she was going to do a pirouette in the middle of the floor and then she would have seemed a dark umbrella, closed, twirling mysteriously in the silence of her shop, the silence of Greek vases and impassive African masks.

We are leaving this Monday for Petit Lac Long in the Laurentians, and will stay there for three weeks. After that, we might motor down to my brother’s who has a chicken farm, ninety miles from New York.³ We can leave the children with him, and then Bet and I cd spend a few days together alone, exploring the art galleries, and possibly take in one or two good plays. I’ll drop you a card from Petit Lac Long.

Any reviews you wd care to write for Delta (that’s the tentative name of our mag) wd be very welcome. I promise you this mag will not be like Tamarack Review... Leonard Cohen has finished an excellent novelette and has a new book of poems underway.⁴ So has Daryl Hine,⁵ besides a verse play he’s bringing to a finish soon. Louis will have another book of poems out in [the] Fall.⁶ He’s got an article on Lampman in the next issue of Culture.⁷

All our love to you all,

Irving
1Natasha Wrangel (b. 1920), Montreal artist; her paintings and drawings are part of the collection of the National Gallery of Canada.

2Baron Pyotr Wrangel (1878-1928), general who led the White forces in the final phase of the Russian Civil War (1918-20); Wrangel died in exile in western Europe.

3Larry Latch (Lazarovitch) (1906-76).

4Leonard Cohen, A Ballet of Lepers: an Anthology unpublished 1957; see 289.5.


5Paryl Hine, The Carnal and the Crane (Toronto: Contact, 1957). [Hine did not publish a verse-play; Layton is probably referring to the long dramatic poem "The Return from Unlikeness: A Poem in Three Parts" included in The Carnal and the Crane (21-35).]

6Louis Dudek, Laughing Stalks (Toronto: Contact, 1958).

Dudek, En México (Toronto: Contact, 1958).

8Dudek, "The Significance of Lampman," Culture 18.3 (Fall, 1957): 277-90.

124.[ts]

Petit Lac Long,  
Co. Terrebonne, Que,  
July 20, 1957

Dear Desmond,

Here we are and there’s no swimming to speak of and the flies raise big red welts on your body with tiny pinholes in them, just to remind you who did it. The part of the lake that we can see from our cottage is full of weeds and frogs and it isn’t much better anywhere else, since it isn’t much of a lake to begin with, just a bend of a lake that somehow contrived to get itself separated from the main body of water. I bought Maxie an air rifle, and he goes frog shooting; though I insist he give them a sporting chance by standing a considerable distance away from his croaking target. I don’t think he’s hit one yet. Sissyboo draws and goes into a tantrum like an artist much older when the lines resist her. She curses their perversity with a talent and rage, truly astonishing in one so young. You can guess where she gets that from.

There are some good hills nearby which I climb daily; there sun myself, read after a fashion, mainly sit with pencil and paper and wait for lines and images to come into my head. The sun on my face and bare chest, the hot earth under me, give as good a feeling as I hope to have in this world or the next. And when the lines begin to form...

I hope you like the two poems I am enclosing. The one, "Climbing", makes a statement about the father-son relationship. Am I mistaken in thinking it both dignified and moving? I do not think I am, but as a father yourself, not forgetting you’re a critic, tell me how it strikes you. "Olives for Jay Macpherson" is a parody, but also something more than that. It’s my statement about poetry and about
the status of poetry in this country. She’s a genuine poet, but a very limited one; wise enough, too, to work within her limitations. But the official critical opinion will be all for her, precisely because she speaks in riddles and never touches on any of the large interests of the world. The same is true for Daryl Hine, another Patrick Anderson, melody outrunning matter. Reading Anderson today one can see his meretriciousness, the false glitter, the laughable Auden-Rilke-Thomas mannerisms. It was evident even at the time when he was writing to anyone who wanted from poetry something more than clever word puzzles, amalgamations of euphonious sound. How silly in retrospect now seem the reviews of his work. Jaymac is not an Anderson, she IS a real poet, while he always struck me as something of a phony, and an English phony at that, to me always the phoniest of them all. And Hine too is a real poet, but what they want most of all is good advice, not the kind of hot castrato air, the Chester Duncans\(^4\) can hand them out. Or the Kildare Dobbs. But that’s the sort of thing the professional critics and reviewers of my country are good at doing, really the genteel tradition all over, but this time in the control of bastards who are sicker and slicker. I hate their breed with a deadly hatred, and I don’t care who knows it. I’ll fight them with every last breath in my body, with every last invective I can hurl. To remember me all they will need to do is to examine their arms and chests for the clawmarks...Excuse me for doing a Sissyboo on you.

Duncan, on Critically Speaking, which I’m assuming you heard, attacked Layton the legend and never once I believe read the book he was supposed to be reviewing.\(^5\) He pulled the same stunt that George Woodcock did in his review of In the Midst of My Fever for the Queen’s Quarterly.\(^6\) I bloodied Woodcock’s nose for pulling that old castrato stunt, but that’s nothing to what I have in store for the Manitoban chestnut. He’ll either stop being a lazy and incompetent hack, or give up the business altogether or the old Maestro has lost his craft and venom. Which, believe me, I haven’t.

It’ll seem odd to close so angry a letter with love for you and Mary, but I do.

Irving

enclosure: ts "Climbing" and "Olives for Jay Macpherson" (both poems are dated "Petit Lac Long, July 19, 1957").

\(^1\)This incident represents the genesis of Layton’s poem "Cain."

\(^2\)Irving Layton, "Climbing," A Laughter in the Mind 49.

\(^3\)Layton, "Olives for Jay Macpherson," A Laughter in the Mind 24-25.

\(^4\)Chester Duncan, Professor of English at the University of Manitoba.
July 24, 1957

Dear Irving,

Thanks a lot for your letter of July 20. It rang with the old bravado, the old robustious optimism—whereas your previous two letters had sounded rather weary to me. And it was so good to see two good new poems! I like them both very much. "The Climber", as you say, has dignity & compassion. In its movement & manner it reminds me a good deal of Robert Frost, but not in an imitative way. It has a serene, effortless quality, & yet a sense of climb, and a nice sense of personal relationships—and symbolism to boot. Good. "The Olives" is very good fun, & very clever. But do you really mean 'beard' at the end of stanza six—or 'bird'—and if the former how would you justify it? And I don’t like the word 'gayety' in stanza 8—it’s somehow too tame a word, & in any case it’s not the gaiety of the black olives that the eunuchs are running from but from their vitality, their juiciness, their virility. Then in stanza nine, the last line is off-rhythm—and though I can see a case for a break in the rhythm at that point, I don’t think it’s a case that can be sustained. After all she gobbles it down—so let’s swallow fast. Isn’t there another word for venomous that wouldn’t break the rhythm—what about 'venomed'? In stanza 10, shouldn’t the third line be elided to read

"But green olives are all you’ll see"?

Pardon the inpertinence—but you see I’m interested enough to want to see the thing perfect!

Your remarks about Chester Duncan echo almost exactly what I had said just the day before in a letter to Dorothy Livesay. Milton Wilson & Kildare Dobbs are in the same boat. I agree about Anderson & Hine & Macpherson—though as you say Jay has more of the real thing than the others. A passionate little bitch too, if you ever got her aroused I’ll wager!

Mary’s painting like mad under Pinsky’s stimulation, & in spite of the weight of lectures & essays I’ve written the first draft of a good (and very different) short story.

We’re here till August 12, then at PEI for 2 weeks in a cabin by the sea. About Aug 27 I’m due in Toronto. Shall be passing through Mtl. Will you be back?

Love,
Des

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1This line reads "by man and beast and beard" in the version Layton sent Pacey.

2The published version of the poem reads "A venomed invitation."
Dear Desmond,

Let's have more of your "impertinence". Quite sincerely, I say I'd rather have that kind of line-by-line word-by-word criticism than all the plaudits in the world. From praise comes nothing (beyond the momentary pleasure for which I'm as avid as the next fellow); from a judicious picking and pecking may come the perfect poem. Never worry about my sensibilities: when it comes to that kind of criticism I simply haven't got time, however much I may take umbrage at the vague and silly generalities of the Chester Duncans and the Woodcocks. To be truthful, that's the only kind of criticism I respect, because it's the only kind that is really helpful to the practicing poet. If I may make a suggestion: you ought to try to get more of that kind into your reviews--nothing more convincingly proves that the critic knows what he's talking about. I call that the acid test.

Of course I'm pleased as punch that you like the two poems. I've been writing furiously since we came here and if I weren't so lazy I'd type them all out for you. But they're twice as long as the ones I'm enclosing; my typing, even after so many years, is still of the one-finger chicken-pluckin' variety. I've sent one to the Queen's Quarterly; it's called "Cain", and it's about a frog I shot with my son's air rifle. I think it's one of my more successful poems, about as good as any I've ever done. I think you'll like it. From Bull Calfs to Bullfrogs, that's me! I know you like the first, but this one is every bit as skillful and yet has more meat. The other poem is called "Sheep" and is probably the most original poem technically I've ever written, a wonderful rolling rhythm controlled in a stanzaic pattern. It too is a long poem, otherwise I'd type it out for you--but you'll see it in one of the mags, probably Tamarack Review: they pay! "Berry Picking" satisfies me. It's a wonderful likeness of Betty and puts our relationship to each other as honestly, as movingly, and as sadly as I know. It's difficult to live with a person like me; I'm not melodramatizing when I say this. And no one knows better than I what a trial it must be for Betty who has a nature as organic & tranquil as that of raspberries on a bush. I'm too restless and explosive, with enough "go" in me to consume fifteen like her. Well, great will have to be her reward in heaven!

We are thinking of going down to New York and leaving the children with my brother who has a farm ninety miles...
from there. When we get back, I shall "batch" it somewhere in the Laurentians for about three weeks—until school opening—and write and write and write. I want my next book to be my best, and I think I’ve made a fair start towards that with the poems I’ve already written. Since the Fellowship money makes it possible for me to get away, I’m doing just that. Three weeks of uninterrupted writing can pretty well complete the book for me; the next nine months before publication will then be so much gravy. Make no mistake about it; with this one, I’m shooting straight for the stars. If I can only write another ten poems as good as the ones I finished last week, (and I bloody well shall) I’ll really feel I deserve some of the kudos I’ve recently been getting. I never felt more confident, I know I’ve got it in me, all I need is time and peace of mind: and for once in my life, these have now been given to me. Merciful Allah, I praise and adore thee!

Don’t know how "beard" got caught in the revolving door of my mind. It should, as you rightfully suspected, be "bird".

Man and beast and bird.

"Gayety" may not be the exact word I want. But you see the problem, don’t you? I mustn’t be too explicit, the moment I come right out and say black olives = balls, or suggest that equation too strongly the delicate balance of illusion upon which all poetry depends is destroyed. Hence my preference for a neutral word like "gayety" instead of one of the more virile ones you suggest. You may change the word "venomous" to "venomed"—thanks, that’s a real improvement. If you elide the third line in stanza ten, you make it too smooth and singsongy, something I’ve tried hard to avoid in the entire poem, because precisely here lay the challenge. Nevertheless, the "off rhythms" add up to a rhythmical pattern quite successfully, I think... the poem will appear in Louis Dudek’s mag, The Delta.

Glad to hear Mary is painting and that you’ve finished a good short story. My blessings on both of you.

Love,
Irving

enclosure: ts "Berry Picking" (Irving Layton, Petit Lac Long) and "Critically Speaking" (For Chester Duncan)

1Irving Layton, "Cain," Queen’s Quarterly 65.2: 294-95.
4A Laughter in the Mind (Highlands, NC: Jonathan Williams, 1958).
5Irving Layton, "Olives for Jay Macpherson," Pan-ic (see 158.1) np.
August 9, 1957

Dear Desmond,

I hope I haven't overwhelmed Mr Penny with all the material I sent him. Is he one of your better students? Ask him to show you the Aphorisms & Reflections on Poetry. There's one or two nuggets in there, I think.

Leave on the 15th for the Laurentians. Perhaps I can come in for the day you're going to be in Montreal. Certainly, I'd very much like to see you and show you some of my recent poems and read your story. Maybe you'll be able to come back with me to my hermitage for a couple of days. Anyway, I invite you to. Mary still painting furiously? Give her all my warmest love. Bet and the children are fine, and some of the clouds have rolled away.

Love,
Irving

PS Did you get my last letter & poems?

1 Dated August 10 but postmarked August 9.

2 Mr. Robert Penny (b. 1930), received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of New Brunswick in 1962, now a retired high-school teacher living in Plaster Rock, N.B.

Tuesday [August 13, 1957]

Dear Desmond,

Ls D has begun work on the first number of Delta which shd be out before college re-opens. Among other things it will have a strong defence of F.R.S's Eye of the Needle, and my own "Olives for Jay Macpherson". It promises to be a lively number and shd start some fights right across the country—which is, of course, what Delta is here for. As I wrote you, or think I did, Ls is running the whole show, this is his own baby. But I believe he's just as keen as I am to have your reviews and anything else you may wish to write in it. Heaven knows, you belong there. After reading Dobbs' silly piece of condescension in the Can Forum, I'm more than ever alive to your merits. And grateful for them! I hope they publish my rejoinder in next month's issue. Lawrence "smug" & "salacious" about sex. Indeed!

Irving


2 Layton refers specifically to these remarks in Dobbs' review:
As for his bawdiness, there is nothing about it that need seem strange to latter-day puritans, for it is the bawdiness of a puritan standing on his head. That is to say, it isn't the sweet-singing natural bawdiness of popular ballads, but a rather forced, almost smug, salaciousness that owes a good deal (as Mr. Layton generously acknowledges) to D.H. Lawrence. Lawrence, unfortunately, was a prig about sex.

129.[pc] Wednesday [August 14, 1957pm]

Dear Desmond,

Read Frye’s contribution in Ross’s Our Sense of Identity. His basic assumption, if I understand him aright, is that Criticism can be approximated to the empirical sciences. All the critics need to do now is to agree upon a set of acceptable generalizations from the brute facts (literary masterpieces). Then the critics can go on twittering among themselves, because like the symbols in mathematics each literary symbol will have a distinct value, signification etc. I call this "The Higher Semantics" or The Presbyterian View of Literature. Leaves out emotion.

I am astonished and disgusted there’s so little polemics in Canada. None at all, in fact. Contrast this with intellectual life in France and the United States. Small wonder I feel it incumbent upon me to make myself as nasty and disagreeable as I can. The other reason, and the more profound of the two, is that the poet today must hurl the disorder inside him onto the exterior world that generates it— if he is not to go mad.

Love,
Irv


130.

September 30, 1957

Dear Irving,

We’re still in the mad rush of 'first of term’, but I take five minutes off from my labours to say hi! to you & to ask why you have been silent for so long. Have I in some way offended you?

I was sorry not to see you the day I came through on my way back from Toronto, but I only had a little over an hour anyway as my train was late. Pinsky met me, & we had an excellent dinner together.

Not much to report from this end, as I have been swamped with the routine business of registration for the last two weeks. Mary has been having a one-man show in the Art Club Room here for the last two weeks also, & that has kept us busy for a month, what with the framing etc beforehand.

William Patterson, editor of the Saturday Review of Literature, was here for a day last week & I had a good session with him about Canadian writing. I think he will do something to spread knowledge about us in the USA, & has tentatively proposed that I do a column of Canadian literary
news from time to time. In any case he has promised to review my *Ten Canadian Poets* as a first step.²

Delta arrived this morning & I like the look of it. I have skimmed it, & it reads interestingly. I think it will be a great improvement on the mealy-mouthed *Tamarack Review*, & the amorphous *Fiddlehead*. I hope we can give the latter a more distinctive personality, but as Louis implies it would involve dropping our present editorial system completely.³ Thank Louis for sending me the copy, & tell him I'll write something as soon as this rush is over.

I had a very good time in Toronto with Frye, Daniells, etc. I think the *Literary History*⁴ should be a good book. I haven't time to tell you our plans in detail now, but if you are interested I will in a later letter. I also had chats with Jay Macpherson & James Reaney.

Things are booming here. The new Art Gallery⁵ is coming along rapidly, Mary got good reviews for her show, I have more new Honours English students than ever before, the Creative Writing class is larger, & our total enrollment has gone up from 1275 last year to over 1400 this year.

Let me know what you & Betty are up to. I trust you are both poeting & painting to your heart's content.

As ever, Des

---

¹William Patterson (1910-86), travel and tourism consultant, publisher, editor and journalist; editor and associate publisher of *Saturday Review of Literature* from 1951, vice-president 1962-72 and publisher, 1968-72; editor of *America: Miracle at Work*.

²Future issues of *Saturday Review of Literature* did not include a column on Canadian literature, nor a review of *Ten Canadian Poets*, but Pacey and his book were featured in Patterson's article "New Brunswick Renaissance;" see 164.1.

³"Unlike *The Fiddlehead*, on the other hand, we will not publish pages of assorted mints without aim or purpose. We will not read manuscripts through a screen of anonymity; we want to know who is talking and of what."


⁴Carl Klinck proposed his planned *Literary History of Canada* to the director of the University of Toronto Press (Marsh Jeanneret) in October 1956; editors Alfred Bailey, Claude Bissell, Roy Daniels, Northrop Frye and Desmond Pacey were invited to participate in January/February 1957; the first edition of the text appeared in 1965. See "Chapter Eight: Literary History of Canada" in *Giving Canada a Literary History: a Memoir* by Carl F. Klinck, ed. Sandra Djwa (Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1991) 103-140.

⁵The Beaverbrook Art Gallery was currently under construction on the banks of the Saint John River in downtown Fredericton; Neil M. Stewart was the architect.
Dear Desmond,

Since my return from the country, I've been hopping all over the place. For one thing, my mother, who is close to ninety, has been acting her age; for another, Bet and I have decided to take the old adage seriously, I mean the one which says something about distance making the heart grow fonder. I now occupy a small basement apartment—a monk's cell of a room—on the same street as my school and less than two minutes walk from it. Latterly life had been grim for both of us—the present arrangement was the only sensible answer to our problems. I go home two or three times during the week—the rest of the time is spent usefully reading, meditating, and composing poems. At this moment my book has 44 poems and I expect to add another 10 before I bring it out sometime in spring. Now that I have been let out of my cage, I wonder whether I shall ever be able to crawl back into it again—Peace, it's wonderful! I hope things are well with you. Sorry I was unable to see you on your return trip.

Love

Irv

1 Keine ("Klara") Lazarovitch 1870-1959.

2 Absence makes the heart grow fonder. Sextus Propertius, Elegies II, 33, line 43.

3 A Laughter in the Mind (1958) contained 34 poems; a second edition, with 20 additional poems, appeared in 1959.

132.

October 7, 1957

Dear Irving,

Your Thursday postcard gave us quite a shock. I had thought that you & Betty were so very much in love with each other—and the idea that you prefer to live apart is hard to accept.

Reading between the lines of your card, I gather that you have been going through a pretty hellish time lately. I don't suppose there's anything I can do to help, but if there is don't hesitate to let me know.

Mary sends her love & hopes that you will soon be out of the woods. Keep in touch with us in any case.

As ever,

Des P

133.

Monday [October 21, 1957pm]

Dear Desmond,

Let me get this off to you before another wk runs by.

Last Wednesday, or rather the wk before that, I motored up to Toronto to give readings at Victoria College and the
Greenwich Art Gallery,\textsuperscript{1} Jay Macpherson arranging the first and Souster the second. Both were well-attended and I was pleased to see that several poems of mine were already well-known, judging by the requests I received from the floor to read them.

I very much appreciate yours and Mary's concern and sympathy. By now, I think the worst is over, though I did have a rough time of it, emotionally. Oddly enough, the poems I wrote during this period are among the most joyful I've ever written. I finished one yesterday that's a genuine masterpiece.\textsuperscript{2} Okay. My mother is declining steadily...that's my real problem just now. Bet and the kids are well, and we still love each other devotedly.  

Yrs  
Irv

\textsuperscript{1}Irving Layton, poetry reading, Victoria College, University of Toronto, 9 October 1957.

Layton, poetry reading, Greenwich Art Gallery, Toronto, 9 October 1957.

\textsuperscript{2}"Captives," see 135 and 136.10.

134.  
October 23, 1957

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your card of Monday.  
I'd like to see the poem that you describe as a genuine masterpiece.

Sorry to hear your mother is so unwell, but delighted to hear that you & Bet are still devoted to one another. I don't know whether you realize how completely in the dark I am about the last six weeks or so of your life--at any rate I know so little of what is going on that I don't feel able to comment or do anything except keep hoping for the best.

I wrote Louis about Delta\textsuperscript{1}, but haven't heard from him yet. As I was critical of some of his remarks I may have made him mad--but I should have liked to get his angry reply anyway. My main point was that he spends too much time displaying the chip on his shoulder. Why the hell does he persist in his priggish attitude--everybody's out of step but our Louis--it's becoming faintly nauseating.

I wrote a short story day before yesterday that is at least a minor masterpiece of social observation & compassion.\textsuperscript{2} It's based on an experience I had this summer of seeing a little girl lost in the midst of a gay crowd of Sunday vacationers--never felt so absolutely disembowelled with pity, & have tried to project the feeling. Of course, six weeks from now the story may read like a sentimental bedtime story.

Have also written & sold my first ghost story\textsuperscript{3}--a potboiler if you will, but relaxing to write & quite good in its atmospheric effect I think. Have not yet revised the house story,\textsuperscript{4} but will do so one of these nights. By the way, there's a good chance Ryerson may bring out a book of
my stories,5 which would give me a great thrill. If I had some encouragement, I would write far more & better stories than I have so far (which I know isn't saying much!)

Mary too has been having some successes. She had a watercolour accepted by the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour for their travelling exhibition which opens in Hamilton on Nov 1, and an oil still life by the Maritime Art Association’s Travelling Exhibition. Her one-man show here in September drew good reviews & attendance.

I seem to be pretty well bogged down in hack work at the moment: I did a long & very nasty review of The Selected Poems of Marjorie Pickthall6 (what pretentious drivel!) for the Forum, am to review Eggleston’s The Frontier and Canadian Letters (dull, dull) for Dalhousie Review,7 have to write an article on "Contemporary Writing in New Brunswick" for a book on The Arts in NB8 for the Provincial Travel Bureau (!!), & have my long section in 20th C Canadian fiction to do for The Literary History of Canada.9

Ryersons are still pursuing me to succeed Lorne Pierce as editor, & they are really doing their best to make the post attractive. I don’t think I should bite, however. I have so much more freedom where I am.

Would you be interested in coming down here some time this winter to address the local branch of the Humanities Association of Canada? I don’t know whether I could swing it or not--I am no longer the president--but it would be worth a trip if you would be interested. We have no funds & usually don’t have outside speakers, but I might use my influence with the president of UNB10 to get a travel grant for you.

Pierce says my Ten Canadian Poets will be available before Xmas, but that the official publication date will be Jan 1, 1958. Just what the idea is, I don’t know. Perhaps he doesn’t want to run me for the Gov-General’s Award against the redoubtable Mr Frye11--not a bad idea, at that.

Love,
Des P

1Desmond Pacey, letter to Louis Dudek, 9 October 1957, Dudek Papers, National Archives of Canada.


Dear Desmond,

Your letter, so full of good news, was very welcome, but I haven't until now had a free moment to answer it. Last week I was at Queen's on Malcolm Ross's invitation to read before the newly-formed English Club; when I returned I had to dive into a pile of exam papers & composition exercises and work furiously to make up for the missed time. This year, since I have four grades to teach—actually five classes—the paperwork snows me under. Quite different, and how, from previous years! No more composing during schooltime, either. That, too, belongs to an earlier and happier, at any rate, a freer period. I believe I wrote you that my school moved into a new building, an annex of a ritzy synagogue. Well, besides other advantages, it offers me free lunches which I get in the following way. When midday rolls around, I take my seat beside the hot air vent, pull out a slice of bread from my pocket and wait for the rich steaming odours of food to come through it. There are enough to gratify a regiment, and at least once during the week I am drowned in a veritable Turkish bath of smells that come at me propelled by an efficient blower system that was originally installed to heat the classroom but which has shown a diabolical aptitude for taking on this extra job. When I investigated the wherefrom of these smells, I learned that they were the inevitable culinary by-products of wedding and Bar-Mitzvah preparations: there's nothing to be done but gorge oneself on them. As for my poor, suffering students they shall have to learn to take Wordsworth & Milton with odours from assorted spices tickling their nostrils; if you should afterwards have one of them in your class, you'll need only say "garlic" for Paradise Lost to spill from his lips. Who knows what other literary associations are presently being forged: say, with basil, marjoram, thyme and myrrh.

My trip to Queen's was a great success. Malcolm Ross was very pleased with the turnout and so was I. The hall was jampacked, many students standing through the hour-long reading, some sitting on the floor. All told I read about
21 poems, chiefly from the Binox, two or three from the Peashooter. The students' response—well, it was glory, glory all the way. I felt I had something to say to them, that this was the generation for whom my poems had been written. Unblushingly, I confess this was a proud moment for me; for this was the acid test, and by all the rules of the game, I had passed it. In the evening about a dozen students with ambition to become poets crowded into Ross's rather small parlour: they read and I commented. They showed little talent, but much earnestness. The main impression I brought away was that they were terribly isolated from the currents that are fashioning the contemporary sensibility. They were charmingly naive and innocent, sweet-tempered and friendly; but poets are old, old bulls, full of malice and suspicion. Let them stay young and innocent; let them marry and breed.

Bet and I have worked out something which satisfies both of us. I live elsewhere but see my family three or four times during the week. This sort of arrangement saves wear and tear on our nerves and the children do not suffer because Bet and I have incompatible temperaments. Bet loves me no less than before, nor I her, but the sad, inescapable fact is that our blood rhythms are quite different: I'm a hungry, excited man with a hundred masks, restless, quickly bored, insatiable for new experiences. For any woman I'd be hard to take, especially for one who, like Bet, is introverted and untalkative. She has never really understood the play-acting side of my nature, the poet's need to try out different emotions. But I'm no doubt being unjust: in such matters, who knows where the truth lies? Let's leave learned folly to the psychoanalysts—they have all the answers. All I can say with certainty is that I feel much freer, much happier, now that I've taken this step. (It was Bet's wish even more than mine.) My book is coming along splendidly: appropriately it's called Laughter in the Mind. There's a poem in it called "Parting" which says much better than these stammering paragraphs do what I think and feel. I'll type it out for you with the "masterpiece" and send them to you sometime during the week. Believe me I am happy with your industry and the success attending it. Please give Mary my warmest regards.

Love
Irving

Malcolm Ross (b. 1911), Canadian literary critic, editor, and Professor of English at Queen's University (1950-62), the University of Toronto (62-68) and Dalhousie (68-82; Professor Emeritus 1982); editor of Our Sense of Identity (1954) and the New Canadian Library series (1958-78).

Irving Layton, poetry reading, English Club, Queen's University, Kingston, 24 October 1957.

Layton taught English at Herzliyah Junior High School beginning in 1946.
Dear Desmond,

At the time of the Hungarian & Suez crises¹ I contended
the Russians wd act with energy & boldness; that no matter
what the West said or did, they were going to hang on to
Hungary. By contrast, our statesmen piled up tremendous
verbal victories, but when the time required equally
vigorous action they ran off with their tails between their
legs, cheered on by "little Englanders",² Bevanites³, and
virginal liberals, itching to maintain their reputations for
virtue. Let me ask you one question: is Russian influence
today greater or less in the Middle East?⁴ And--excuse me,
another: did America’s ditching her allies really pay off?
Hasn’t she, indeed, been compelled to recognize her strange
and sudden incursion into virtue for the ghastly mistake it
was and completely revise her Middle East policy in the
light of fact and not moral extravaganzas so dear to the
heart of liberals and humanitarians? The Suez fiasco was
the real turning-point in the political fortunes of the
pluto-democracies: historians will mark their decline from
that event. And now Sputniks⁵ are in the sky, and the best
our nerveless, obfuscated leaders can do is mutter something
abt revising our missile program. How idiotic! As if
Sputnik didn’t symbolize an entire way of living and
working, an attitude toward life more serious than our own,
more realistic and--I shall say it--more heroic. Our part
of the world has become so stupefied by trash, hucksterism,
TV cuties and big business control we no longer distinguish
between freedom and apathy, democracy and rationalizations
for funk and spinelessness. Most demoralized are the
intellectuals (vide their cowardice masked, of course, as
virtue and decency in the Suez affair). The sad part in all
this, is that their very decency and good intentions play
them false for these are manipulated by the power elites who
push the controls. These elites will end up by dragging
freedom and all our other values into the historical grave
that awaits them. How childish and irrelevant most of our
major writers now seem! To tell you truth, I have a hard
time these days to keep a shred of respect for them--they
seem, somehow, so outmoded with their visions & quartets &
cantos.⁶

Yrs,
Irving

PS Have written lyrics for four songs that wd be smash hits
if I cd locate anyone who’s interested in doing a musical
comedy. Do you know any such? My partner⁷ has a real
genius for writing catchy tunes, the best since Victor
Herbert.⁸
After I mailed my last letter to you I bethought myself that the "marry & breed" line might offend you—you being the champion breeder of us all. But it was lovely, innocent girls I had in mind and Hamlet's vehement "Would you breed sinners?"9

--All the best,
Irv

enclosure: ts "Parting" (August 19, 1957) and "Captives"10

1Late October and November, 1956.

2Hugh Gaitskell and his Opposition Labour Party opposed England's interference in international affairs; as Aneusin Bevan asked in the House on November 1, 1956—"Are you going to bleed Britain to death in Egypt like France is bleeding herself to death in Algeria?"

3Term given to the left-wing of the Labour Party, led by Aneusin Bevan, one of the most vocal opponents of British actions in the Suez; speaking to the House on November 1, 1956, Bevan described the Anglo-French ultimatum as "the language of a bully."

4The Soviet Union had backed and supplied Egypt during the Suez Crisis; in November 1957 the Egyptian war minister and supreme commander of the Armed Forces visited Moscow for three weeks with the result that the Soviet government agreed to provide economic aid amounting to 700 million rubles.

5Sputnik 1, the first artificial earth satellite, was launched October 4, 1957, circling the earth until January 4, 1958. It was the first in a series of ten Sputniks, 1957-61.


7This is the first reference in the correspondence to Aviva Cantor (see 169.9).

8Victor Herbert (1859-1924), Irish-born American composer of over forty operettas (including Babes in Toyland 1903) and light music.

9"Wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" 3.1.122 William Shakespeare, Hamlet.


[sc November 16, 1957pm ts "The Toy Gun" (A Laughter in the Mind 2nd ed.) with marginalia]: The Riviera is a Bohemian hangout on Stanley street. Trafalgar is an exclusive girl's school in Montreal. ts:"An Impertinence" (unpublished)

137.[pc] [November 20, 1957pm]
Dear Desmond,

Have sent you two letters and poems, but I've not heard from you. I hope I haven't unwittingly hurt you, yet it's possible, given the turbulent state of my emotions the past two months. God knows my free-wheeling style of writing at the best of times lacks normal discretion. But now...!!

All the best, Irving
Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letters of November 2 and 12 and for the two poems "Parting" & "Captives". I have been ploughed under with work, & have also been away to a conference at St FX, and hence have not had a chance to write before. In fact I am really stealing this time from the preparation for a seminar on Dickens this afternoon.

Glad you had such a successful trip to Queen’s. You didn’t say whether you would like to come to UNB if I could dig up travelling expenses. Am I to assume you are too busy?

By the way, Miriam W has written¹ to invite Mary & me to spend three or four days with them between Xmas & New Year’s, & we are hoping to be able to do so. Mary needs a change & rest badly, & we’d both like to see you & the rest of our Montreal friends--so we shall try to get a housekeeper & come up.

Mary & I have both read your two poems several times. They made Mary weep, she found them so moving. We both feel that they are very powerful--in fact Mary’s comment was "the man is a giant"--but we did find them rather hard to understand. In "Parting" it is mainly the tortured syntax, though here the main sense is clear enough. In "Captives" I find difficulty in seeing who the ‘little one’² is--a child, or a sweetheart? But of course the main idea is clear enough here also--but don’t you think this poem is rather too long?

Well, these are petty objections. These poems remind me of the later Yeats--and I don’t mean that in a derogatory way. They’re not imitative, but they have that violent power, that bitter gaiety, that richly angry compassion of "The Tower" and the Crazy Jane poems.³

I’ve been busy with a lot of routine matters--arranging a programme for next year’s Summer School, revising the University calendar, writing an article for the Bulletin of the Humanities Association,⁴ reading page proofs & making an index (what a job!) for Ten Canadian Poets, writing a long review of Eggleston’s The Frontier & Canadian Letters⁵ etc etc.

Mary has done almost no painting all fall--too much housework--& is feeling pretty low. We need pepping up--so please arrange to be very gay & stimulating if & when we come to Montreal!

Give our love to Betty, & do remind Dudek that I hope to get an answer to my letter to him.

Keep writing--your stuff is magnificent!

As ever,
Des P

PS Could we have either or both of these poems for Fiddlehead? If not, have you some others we might use? DP

¹Miriam Waddington, letter to Desmond Pacey, 4 November 1957, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.
"Little one" was Layton's pet name for Aviva Cantor.


6See 134.7.

139. November 22 [1957]
Dear Irving,

Have your card--& by now you probably have my letter. You will gather from it, I hope, that you have not in any way offended me. I did disagree with almost everything you said in your political letter--but I expect to disagree with people on politics, especially on international politics. I myself am a convinced pacifist, & that alters my view on these questions. I couldn't possibly support the British action in Suez for example.

However, whenever you do feel like sounding off on politics or anything else, be sure & let 'er rip. You can't hurt my feelings on that score.

Wish I could think of a good joke to pass along, but I haven't heard a joke in months. It seems to me that the whole damn world is taking itself far too seriously these days. You included--remember that the Yeats motto is bitter and gay.

The only bit of news I have is that the General Manager of Ryerson Press flew down here Wednesday especially to try & persuade me to take the editorship. They've raised the salary offer to a quite fantastic sum, but I don't think I shall go. At any rate the offer has brought the pot to the boil here, and I am likely to be promoted to Dean of Arts very shortly. But all this is on the quiet, so don't spread it around.

Fred C just dropped in--& sends his regards.

Love & kisses,
Des Pacey

140.[pc] 3360 Ridgewood #2, Montreal, Que
[November 28, 1957pm]

Dear Desmond,

Thanks for your two letters. I'm glad to hear you don't mind my sounding off from time to time on politics and related matters. I didn't know you were a pacifist. That's where I can't go along with you. My people tried that road for two thousand years: it led them to the ovens of Hitler.
It's because I'm concerned about democracy and all the values it stands for, that I'd like to see it more resolute and militant than it has shown itself hitherto. There's Yeats, but there's also Milton. And even Yeats got pretty hot abt Irish politics...when he wasn't writing of it with "bitter gayety". But poets are a queer, mixed-up lot. Glad you and Mary liked the two poems. Go ahead and use them in The Fiddlehead. Remember me to Cogswell.

Love,
Irv

PS I don't think I can make the trip this yr. Thanks.

1Milton served as Latin Secretary in Cromwell's government 1649-60.

2Compared to his friend Maud Gonne and others, Yeats was a moderate on the Irish political scene--but the crushing of the Easter Rebellion in 1916 spurred his outrage and finest political verse. He served six years in the Senate after the Irish Free State was formed.


[December 9/10, 1957]
Dear Desmond,

My pupils are busy with grammar--a free moment for me to write this! I was in Toronto last weekend for another Fighting Words1 program. Prof Grant2 was on the panel with me, so was Mizener,3 the fellow who wrote The Far Side of Paradise,4 a biography of Fitzgerald. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. The CBC treated us to a $3.00 meal at the Town & Country--some good talk, mostly about Richler's5 last bk,6 which both Weaver and Nat Cohen profess to find disappointingly poor. Afterwards, I went up to Milton Wilson's place for a drink, and some more good talk, this time abt Shelley. MW is having a book on him brought out by, I think it is, the Columbia Press.7 I hope you and Mary come here for your holidays. I promise you a gay and cheerful Irving, the gayest ever. My love to Mary.

Yrs
Irv

1Fighting Words, CBC Television, 1 December 1957. (Panelists Irving Layton, Douglas Grant, Arthur Mizener and Dr. Karl Stern; moderator Nathan Cohen.)

2Douglas Grant (1921-69), Professor of English at the University of Toronto 1949-60, and the University of Leeds 1960-69, editor of The University of Toronto Quarterly 1955-60, and author of The Far East: China and Japan (1961).

3Arthur Mizener (1907-88), editor, scholar, critic, Professor of English at Cornell; author of The Sense of Life in the Modern Novel (1964) and Scott Fitzgerald and his World (1972).


December 12, 1957

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your two cards.

Glad to hear of the good time you had in Toronto. We missed the show, as our TV station has taken it off the air—presumably because of the fuss about the programme which dealt with childbirth & prostitution. What stupidity! Mary heard a re-broadcast of the show on the radio, & said it was an extremely good one.

I only know Milton Wilson slightly, & can't say that I've been impressed with his reviews in the Forum. He has always struck me as a milk-and-water disciple of Frye, without Frye's brilliance. Is he really a good chap? Has he any guts? In his reviews he always seems to sit on the fence, & so qualify his remarks with whys & wherefores and buts that they lose all point.

By the way, what did you think of my "Turning New Leaves" review of Pickthall in the December Forum? I felt quite pleased with it when I read it in print—which doesn't always happen.

It begins to look as if Mary & I won't be jetting to Montreal after all. We can't seem to find a suitable housekeeper to look after the children, & I am about ready to give up. We should of course love to see you—whether you are bitter or gay or both at once.

Mizener has the reputation for being the most brilliant young academic in the USA. Is he?

Love,
Des Pacey

1Fighting Words CBC Television, 1 December 1957.

2Milton Wilson began writing music reviews for the Forum in June 1947, gradually branching out to theatre reviews; he had written only four book reviews for the Forum at this time.

3See 134.3.

December 19, 1957

Dear Desmond,

If I had had a postcard handy I'd have written at once to tell you how mighty good I thought your MP piece in the Canadian Forum was. You go from strength to strength and are now beginning to write with a sure authority. You've ticked her off so well, there isn't a single remark you make
I or anyone else can take exception to. Linking her up with the early Yeats\textsuperscript{1} was a shrewd touch, so was your closing statement\textsuperscript{2} about what her possible value might be today for Canadn poets who for all their "obscurity" and seemingly greater "sophistication" are, after all the jam and learned goo are cleared away, not doing anything very different from what she did. What a deal of literary posturing in Canad poetry! You’re about the only critic in this country who won’t let yourself be fooled by it. More power to you, Desmond. It’s not from eyestrain got from poring over a library of books, but from a lot of painful living that a single good line of poetry ever comes. Those who believe otherwise are fooling themselves. A good line of poetry is as authentic as a man’s palm, and for myself I like the poet who comes to me with badly scarred hands. Fingernail-biting is another matter—the ability to distinguish between the two is often the best test for the genuine critic.

I’m sorry you and Mary can’t make it for the Christmas holidays. It would have given me great pleasure to see you. Bet and I, after many difficult and heartbreaking weeks, are together again, the ghost of whatever misunderstandings were responsible for them at least laid away—I devoutly hope forever. It would have been like old times to have you and Mary here with a group of the local wits and cognoscenti to meet you. Is it really out? Maybe if you whistle hard enough, a housekeeper will come down the chimney to free you for the trip. If I could wrap one up for you I’d send her to you as a Xmas gift. Since there isn’t one I can catch by the petticoats I’m sending you instead three poems, the Côte des Neiges\textsuperscript{3} cemetery one being the most recent. I think it’s also the best of the three though you are free to quarrel with me. I shan’t mind. There are two things I’ve done in that poem which make me burble with satisfaction—one, made a statement about poetry I’ve always wanted to (the paradox of art—it’s life-in-death, and death-in-life; but I go beyond or apart from Keats\textsuperscript{4} in my awareness of the ineluctable tragedy and poignancy of living & dying which not even poetry can finally exorcise) and second, my use of "internal resonance"—both the tone and the technique are my own: I think. The other poems are not bad, but I’ll let you talk about them; that is, if you should choose to do so.

I’ll close this letter by saying how very grateful I am to both you and Mary for your loyalty and understanding when I stood most in need of them. Your kind, affectionate words cheered me up again & again. My mother is now in the Hebrew Old People’s Home, and seems content. Bet and I are happier and wiser.

All my love to you and Mary,

Irving

enclosure ts "Côte des Neiges Cemetery", "Autumn Lines for My Son",\textsuperscript{5} and "Poem for the Next Century"\textsuperscript{6}
1. Pacey's review emphasizes Pickthall's debt to Yeats:
She also owed a good deal to the Celtic Revival, and especially to the early Yeats—so that her work is full of twilight, tears, sleep, sighs, mists and all the other late Romantic paraphernalia. Such a stanza as this, for example, might have come straight out of The Wanderings of Oisin (207).

2. Layton refers to Pacey's closing remarks:
Sometimes I wonder whether in the very clever and mythologically sophisticated young poets of today, we are not witnessing another retreat into artificiality. For poetry, wherever it ends, must always begin in the close observation of the here and now. And this, I believe, is the lesson that Miss Pickthall has to teach us (208).


---

This is the start of the Cemetery poem. While waiting for someone in the lobby of the hotel, the first lines came to me: I had to borrow pencil & paper from the desk clerk.

Irving

The smell, the colour of faded orange peel,
The sound of an exacerbating high political note,
Like all first-rate poetry, it is
Sensuous and intellectual.

Squirrel,
that rascal leaps
from twig to twig

The family plot
and placard which announces
dead Pere Loisel & his spouse
spawned fine graves.

I half-close my eyes
multiplying the diamonds in the snow
A hearse: wafer-thin the smell
In cemeteries, high-pitched piercing
The brain

A hearse: O indecent and wafer-thin the smell
In cemeteries, like a note high-pitched
Piercing the brain, ironical; and like all
Good poems sensuous and intellectual.

Like all good poems, the odours
here are sensuous
Like all
good poems
the odour here
is sensuous
and intellectual
it has the colour
of faded onion peel
it has a high-pitched note
wafer thin
piercing the brain,
the mausoleums
are massive & vain

This family plot
of Pere Loisel
and his good dam
where two
spawned these five
neat graves.

145.

249 Winslow St
Fredericton, NB
December 21, 1957

Dear Irving,
Delighted to get your letter today & to discover that
you & Betty are back together again. It’s the best news
we’ve had in a long time.

Glad you liked the Pickthall review. I’ve had a good
many favourable comments on it, & I rather liked it myself!
You can’t corner all the vanity, you know!

I liked your poems, but I’ve only read them once or
twice yet & have no considered judgment to express.

The occasion of this letter is to tell you that we have
finally located a housekeeper & shall be arriving in
Montreal, all being well, on the morning (train about 9 am)
of Friday next. Since we accepted Miriam’s invitation to
stay with them, we shan’t be as free as we might like, but I
believe she will be working on Friday anyway. Could you
check with her & find out when she has committed us? We
certainly want to see as much of you as possible. We’ll
probably phone you Friday morning & see what we can work
out.

I’ve a lot of work to do (exams just over) so I’ll
close for now, & leave the talk till next week.

As ever,
Des
January 25, 1958

Dear Irving,

I don't know whether your long silence indicates that you are offended with me, or whether like me you have been very busy—I hope only the latter.

Since getting back from Montreal I have been living in a mad whirl. First of all we were inundated with invitations to parties for the remainder of the holiday season, and then I had to go off to Harvard for a week to sit as a member of the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship selection committee. These fellowships are open to fourth year students who are considered suitable material for academic posts, and we had candidates from all over eastern Canada & New England. There were twelve of us on the committee--two Canadians & ten Americans from such places as Harvard, Smith, MIT, Dartmouth etc. I had thought I might have some spare time to hear the Symphony, see a play, go to the Museum of Fine Arts etc, but actually we were kept busy interviewing candidates from nine in the morning until eleven at night. It was not until the final day that I had three or four spare hours, and during them I had chats with Douglas Bush1 & I.A. Richards of Harvard. Did you know that Richards has now become a poet?2 I'd noticed several poems with that signature in recent issues of the New Statesman, but didn't think it could be my Richards--but it is, & he is having a volume published this year. (I assume you know that IA Richards is the Practical Criticism man, & one of the chief proponents of Basic English.3 I knew him well at Cambridge.)

Since getting back from Harvard I have been busy catching up with my work here & doing some hack writing. I think I told you that the Travel Bureau here is publishing a book on The Arts in New Brunswick to mark the opening of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery this summer. They pestered me to do the chapter on writing, and I resisted as long as I could but finally succumbed. It is involving reading a lot of stuff that doesn’t interest me too much, as my chapter must deal not only with poetry & fiction but also with history, travel, politics, etc. I'm finding a surprising amount of goodish material coming from such a small province, but of course I can’t say anything very incisive about it. It will not be a job of which I shall be proud, but I came to feel that it was a duty that the provincial university should perform.

I assume you know that my Ten Canadian Poets is now out. I am pleased with the look of the book, and have so far found only one minor printer’s error, but I have a sort of let-down feeling about it now. Perhaps I have had that about every book, but somehow when you actually see the thing in print it falls far below the ideal book you had dreamed of. Or do you share that feeling? I hope the reviewers don’t blast me too completely. That’s why I can never be too hard on a book—I always remember how much blood & sweat goes into the making of any book. As for this
one of mine, I feel that the Pratt chapter is the very best thing I have ever done; the others may be competent but they are not what I wanted them to be, the visionary gleam has departed.

I trust you are writing vigorously. It was good to see you & Betty & Louis in Montreal, and I do wish it had occurred to me that Betty would like to have dinner uptown—we should have been glad to treat you. And if I offended you by my rather insolent final suggestions about looking after her, please forgive me. I am a bit pompous at times I know. But I think we have too much to offer each other in terms of mutual stimulation, encouragement and correction to let a few ill-chosen remarks destroy our friendship. So let’s hear from you.

As ever,

Des P

1Douglas Bush (1896-1983), Ontario-born Professor of English at Harvard, leading scholar of Renaissance literature, author of Paradise Lost in Our Time (1945) and Classical Influences in Renaissance Literature (1952).

2I.A. Richards (see 12.3) embarked on a career as a poet late in life, producing four volumes of verse (including Goodbye Earth and Other Poems 1958, and Internal Colloquies 1971), and three verse-dramas (A Leak in the Universe 1956).

3Basic English, invented by C.K. Ogden, is a simplified version of the language designed to function as an international "second" language and a first step toward learning English; Richards was its main innovator, chiefly at Harvard, where he taught from 1939-70.

4Pacey was a doctoral student at Cambridge 1938-41; Richards taught at Cambridge 1918-39.

Dear Desmond,

I’ve been going through your bk Ten Candn Poets like a shark through water. I started with the chapter on Klein, then moved on to the ones on Birney, Smith and Scott. Now I’m in the middle of the Pratt chapter which will turn out to be yr best--maybe, because like A.M.K he allows you more scope to speak yr piece. You must be pleased to see your "blood, sweat, and tears" so nicely decked out, for the book has a lovely feel and look to it. I predict it shall win you many kudos, for you’ve done an honest and sensitive spot of work. Whatever weaknesses and defects there are in it are more than offset by the informed sensibility and scholarship apparent on almost every page. Mary ought to be very, very proud of you. I assure you, I am--and so is Bet. You have our heartfelt congratulations...

Yr letter in. What offends me is your thinking yr good-natured teasing wd offend me. Good heavens, I was never so insulted. Regards to Mary. All our love to you all. Will write you a letter soon.

Irv
Thursday [February 13, 1958pm]

Dear Desmond,

I've been meaning to write you a letter but I haven't had the time to do it in. Something has come up each time I've put an evening aside for my correspondence. Two weeks ago I was in Ottawa for a reading at Carleton University. Very successful, the best yet. A.D. Hope, the Aussie poet, was there, and we had lunch together with George Johnston and Michael Horyansky. But doubtless Hope has given you all the news abt that episode.

Leonard Cohen is in town, bringing San Francisco and New York with him—I mean he's currently reading poetry while a jazz orchestra fills in with strophes of its own. Ls Dudek tried it one evening; read a long poem too—but Cohen is really laying them in the aisles. A new development in the Montreal School?...

McClelland and Stewart have expressed an interest in my forthcoming bk. All goes well with me, my cup of joy runneth over. I wish the same for you & Mary.

Love,

Irv

1Irving Layton, poetry reading, Carleton University, Ottawa, 30 January 1958.
4Michael Horyansky, Professor of English at the University of Toronto.
5McClelland & Stewart became Layton's publisher with A Red Carpet for the Sun (1959), a relationship which continues in 1994.
for him four nights in a row, & consumed vast quantities of food & drink & read reams of poetry. I liked both man & poetry tremendously—what a great poem is "Imperial Adam"!3 He spoke very enthusiastically of you, your poetry, & your success at Carleton.

Fred C has just had some of his poems read in San Francisco to jazz accompaniment—arranged by James Boyer May.4 I hope Cohen's gimmick works in Montreal.

The president of UNB has just bought one of Mary's oils for his office—her biggest deal yet—$115. Since he shows it to all his visitors, it's great publicity.

Mary was very attracted by Hope—admitted that it made her quite embarrassed to sit next him on our chesterfield!!

Love to Betty & yourself.

Des & Mary

Hi! I admitted that only after Des had given me too much rum. I think he would like me to tell you it isn’t so. Just for fun, I won’t. After all, with half the world between us, he couldn’t be surer of my faithfulness, could he? I haven’t seen the President’s money yet. His name is MacKay. But he tells me he wants it, has fallen in love with it, and that is great publicity. Enjoyed your latest batch of poetry in the Forum.5 Keep it rolling. It would be good to hear some of it here.

Love to you both,

Mary

1Louis Dudek, rev. of Ten Canadian Poets by Desmond Pacey, Critically Speaking, CBC Radio, 17 February 1958.

2Dorothy Livesay, letter to Desmond Pacey, 9 February [1958], Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

3A.D. Hope, "Imperial Adam" The Wandering Islands (Sydney, Australia: Edwards & Shaw, 1956) 35-36.


150.[pc] Wednesday [February 19, 1958pm]

Dear Desmond,

Yr letter in today, and since my pupils are in the midst of exam fever, I’ve got a moment to tell you again how much I enjoyed your bk. I think it’s the best thing you’ve done so far: though sometimes you sound like a lawyer with a client, you’re not afraid to walk up to anyone and say "Boo". You’ve taken yr vest off and gone to work, and what you’ve turned in is a solid piece of work. Roberts, Lampman
and Carman are explained as no one has explained them before: they’re, by far, the best essays I’ve read on them. The Sangster and Pratt chapters are first rate. The weakness of the bk is that no unifying theme is to be found in it, that one can’t see the wood for the trees. But I shall write you a more detailed criticism this weekend...I hope.

McClelland & Stewart want to bring out a selection of my poems, Jan 1959. I might let them do it, if they meet certain conditions. They’re also interested in my new volume...I’m glad you were pleased with A.D. Hope’s visit. I liked him a lot myself when we met at Scott’s. Love to you & Mary.

Irv

McClelland and Stewart published Layton’s selected poems in 1959--A Red Carpet for the Sun, which was published by Jonathan Williams in the United States; they did not become involved with Layton’s next volume--A Laughter in the Mind, published exclusively by Williams.

151. Friday night [February 28, 1958]
Dear Desmond,

This evening I was reading your bk again, and afterwards when I was filing away the year’s correspondence, I made a pile of miscellaneous letters which I thought the literary historian might want to glance at, but at the last moment I decided against mailing you the packet. Better you shd hunt them up in some obscure corner of a library, as you hunted up some things of Sangster’s--why should I thoughtlessly rob you of the thrill of suddenly coming upon some unexpected treasure trove? For some years I’ve been sorting letters addressed to me into large brown manila envelopes, and now there’s quite a stack of them--one of these days I’ll cart them over to the Redpath library and dump them on the astonished lap of Mr Pennington. If I weren’t so lazy or so much of an egotist intent on his own work, I’d make up an interesting book, one that wd give a vivid picture of this country’s poetic renaissance, and the part that the Montreal poets have played in it. Well, I can always save that for my uncreative old age, though what you show of D.C. Scott’s vigour in publishing three books in the last year of a long life is very heartening.1

Bob Weaver wants to use my short story "Vacation in La Voiselle" for a collection the Oxford Press (Little Classics Series) has asked him to do.2 I’m hugely pleased. It’s the one story of all the stories I’ve written which really satisfies me by its combination of freshness, elegance and psychological insight. My other stories may have one, or two, but not all three of these qualities, though "Mrs. Polinov," I think, comes close enough to fool me. After I’ve gotten A Laughter in the Mind launched, I shall work towards bringing out a book of short stories.3 There are times when I think I have the knack, though I’m sorely out of practice in writing prose, and poetry simply unfits
anyone for writing anything sensible. Nevertheless, I have supreme confidence in my abilities, and when I’m feeling well, as I am now, and have been for a long time, I can’t imagine anything thwarting me. My book of poems is all but complete; however, I’ve decided to postpone its publication until the fall, so that I can include the summer’s harvesting. I’ve reworked a poem, "An Errant Husband to Ovid" to make it, I believe, the finest thing I’ve done in that genre, and a veritable polished classic. Ovid himself wd. not be ashamed to own it [as] his. I’ve also found, after 6 months of failure, a concluding stanza to "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom" which ties up the poem for me wonderfully. Here it is:

So whatever else poetry is freedom. Let
Far off the impatient cadences reveal
A padding for my breathless stilts. Swivel,
O hero in the fleshy groves, skin and glycerine,
And sing of lust, the sun’s accompanying shadow
Like a vampire’s wing, the stillness in dead feet--
Your stave brings resurrection, O aggrieved king.

I’ve boldly identified the poet with Christ, and this image harks back to the King Canute in an earlier stanza.
"Stave", of course, with all its associations and meanings is pure inspiration.
McClelland & Stewart are bringing out my Selected Poems in January 1959. We sign the contract in a week. All my love to Mary.

Yrs,
Irv

1Layton refers to a passage from Pacey’s chapter on Scott in Ten Canadian Poets:
In 1947, the last year of his life, Scott illustrated his own motto of "effort, even unto the end effort!" by publishing three books. The first of these, Walter J. Phillips, is a biographical and critical sketch of the Canadian painter....The second of the books of 1947 was The Selected Poems of Archibald Lampman. The third and most important book was The Circle of Affection, a miscellany which brings together four new short stories and a group of later poems, five essays, nine early but uncollected poems, and six early short stories.(160-61)


3Layton’s second volume of poems Now is the Place (1948) had contained two stories "Vacation in La Voiselle" (3-14) and "A Death in the Family" (17-24); his next volume The Swinging Flesh would include ten stories: "Vacation in La Voiselle" (1-19), "A Game of Chess" (20-31), "A Pleausible Story" (32-46), "The Philistine" (47-57), "The English Lesson" (58-70), "Mrs. Polinov" (71-87), "Piety" (88-105), "Unemployed" (106-15), "A Death in the Family" (116-27), and "Osneck" (128-38). These ten stories were reprinted in Engagements: The Prose of Irving Layton (McClelland & Stewart, 1972).

Tuesday [March 4, 1958pm]
Dear Desmond,

I planned to write you a long letter this past weekend, but the Fates interfered in the form of another urgent call. This time I thoroughly enjoyed myself, for Prof Galbraith of Harvard was on the panel with me, and since both he and I were "homeless" that evening we suppered together. He's a very tall man, about 6'6" I'd say, speaks slowly, and has a bag of wonderful stories about "liberals" like Schlesinger, Sweezy, and others in whom I'm interested. He worked on both Stevenson's campaigns and had much new information to tell me about him. He's asked me to visit him at Harvard, and promises to introduce me to all the distinguished men there.

This Thursday I gave a reading at my own Alma Mater, Macdonald College. Life is action. All my love to you and Mary.

Irv

1Fighting Words, CBC Television, 2 March 1958. (Panelists Irving Layton, J.K. Galbraith, William Blatz and John Saywell; moderator Nathan Cohen.)

2John Kenneth Galbraith (b. 1908), Ontario-born American economist, Professor of Economics at Harvard, advisor to President Kennedy, ambassador to India (1961-63), and author of The Affluent Society (1958) and The New Industrial State (1967).

3Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr (b. 1917), American historian and spokesman for postwar liberalism, author of The Age of Jackson (1945) and The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom (1949); speechwriter for Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson in the 1950s and close associate of the Kennedys in the 1960s.

4Paul M. Sweezy (b. 1910), Professor of Economics at Harvard (1940-46), co-editor of Monthly Review magazine (which he co-founded in 1949), author of On the Transition to Socialism (1972) and Post-Revolutionary Society (1980).

5Layton was a student at Macdonald College in Montreal 1933-36.
I was on a panel here last Thursday on the future of UNB. We had a lively time, & the president & I particularly had a lot of fun insulting one another. I was claiming that the Arts Faculty needed more space, & that to get it we should kick the Administration out of the Arts building--including of course the president.

By the way, as you are about the only person to whom I mentioned the possibility of my becoming dean of arts here, I better tell you that that is off for the time being anyway. The president's idea was to make the present dean, Alfie Bailey, academic vice-president, & me dean of arts. Alfie was quite keen on the idea at first, but he has now changed his mind--and since neither the president nor I want to push him out of the deanship, nothing will be done. I don't think I really want to be dean of arts anyway--I think I am much better off as head of the English Dept. Administrative work bores me, it is so uncreative, & the difference in pay isn't particularly important. By the way, Alfie Bailey has recently been left a legacy of about a quarter of a million by some rich uncle in Ottawa--so he doesn't need the higher salary the vice-presidency would bring him.

Those letters of yours--to change the subject--sound extremely interesting. I am trying to build up a collection of such letters at this university, and if you did feel you could spare some of them for us rather than for McGill we should be delighted to have them. While I am speaking of letters, I should say that I got a most enthusiastic letter from Birney yesterday about my book. He thinks the chapter on Pratt is the best & by far the best thing ever done on him.

I'm glad to hear that Weaver is to use your "Vacation at La Voiselle"--a story I have been hoping to use in the fourth edition of my Book of Canadian Stories, which should be required in about another year. But Weaver's anthology is a bit of a sore point with me. Years ago--five years ago, at least--I noticed that there was no World's Classics edition of Canadian short stories, & wrote to Oxford UP offering to edit such a collection. They wrote to say that they had already made an agreement with another editor--I presume Weaver. I have serious doubts of Weaver's competence, & he certainly hasn't pursued his task with any great vigour. Also, I feel sure that he will leave me out of his anthology, as he has always been against me for unknown reasons. I had four or five stories on the "Canadian Short Stories" series on CBC, then all of a sudden he started rejecting all my stories out of hand. He didn't put me in his Canadian Stories, that collection of CBC stories he did with Helen James, in spite of the fact that I had had more stories broadcast than almost anyone in the book. I don't suppose you can put in a plug for me? Do you know him well enough to suggest in a letter that he ought to have one of my stories in his collection? Or do
you think he should? Probably the answer to both questions is no.

I have now signed the contract with Ryerson for my own book of stories—The Picnic & Other Stories—Daniells has written a very nice introduction, & the book is to be out this fall.

I am glad to hear that you are in such a creative phase, & pouring out poetic masterpieces. I'd like very much to see some of your more recent efforts, & especially the Ovidian piece.

I am still bogged down in what is essentially hack work. I have now completed my article on "Contemporary Writing in New Brunswick" (apart from the Fiddlehead, there isn't very much) & am working on my section (prose fiction since 1920) of the Literary History of Canada. But I have a number of ideas for short stories, & one of these days I shall bust out & write them.

Mary is keeping at her painting. She is about halfway through the third oil painting since Christmas, & her work is getting better—freer, bolder, stronger—all the time. The painting she has in the current Maritime Art Travelling Exhibition already looks pale beside her new work.

I hope Betty is back at it by now. She is mentioned in an article "Painting in Saint John" in the current (March) issue of the Atlantic Advocate.

Love to you both,

Des

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1Alfred Bailey (b. 1905), New Brunswick poet (Border River 1952; Thanks for a Drowned Island 1973), historian, anthropologist and essayist (Culture and Nationality: Essays 1972), founder of the Fiddlehead poetry club.

2Earle Birney, letter to Desmond Pacey, 6 March 1958, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.


5Robert Weaver and Helen James eds. Canadian Short Stories (Toronto: Orford UP, 1952).

6Roy Daniells, "Foreword," The Picnic and Other Stories (Toronto: Ryerson, 1958) v-ix.

7See 134.7.

March 23, 1958

Dear Desmond,

My friend and publisher, Jonathan Williams, spent several days with me, and I was busy getting interviews for him with CBC,1 and arranging for a talk at Sir George Wms College. He's a tall, engaging man, with a recognizable Southern accent, and a taste for bourbon. One evening we descended on Leonard Cohen's nest in Birdland,2 where he gives poetry readings to the accompaniment of a jazz orchestra. Daryl Hine was also present. It ended up with JW, myself, and DH as well as staple goods L Cohen, all reading poetry. Since it was dark, it was not possible to see the expressions on the faces of the people who were there. A memorable night! Wms will bring out my book A Laughter in the Mind this fall. He was greatly pleased with the poems (40 of 'em) and to speak truth, so am I. I'll write again.

Love to you & Mary,

Irv

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1Irving Layton and Jonathan Williams, "Discussion", Assignment, CBC Radio, 5 April 1958.

2A jazz club in downtown Montreal named for the jazz district in New York City (home of Charlie "Bird" Parker).

April 1, 1958

Dear Desmond,

Here's another postcard: I shd be able to find time this wk to write you a letter. The Easter holidays are only 3 days away, and they were never more welcome. This has been an unusual year for me, the busiest I've ever had. My head gets dizzy merely thinking about it. The trips to Toronto, the readings, trade union meetings, and so on. In another month, my lectures at Sir GW stop, and at last I'll be able to draw unhurried breath again. Did I ever tell you abt my "culture lady",2 a woman I meet with every wk to discuss 19th century English writers. I think I'm getting much more out of the course than she is, for I've had to read a dozen novels which I otherwise never wd have, or I'd left over for my old age. But it's added to the burden considerably...I'll make a nice packet of letters and send it to you for yr collection. Pennington over here is much too stoopid to start anything like this. Bet has a picture in the Spring show & nice mention of it in the papers.3

Love to you all,

Irv

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1Sir George Williams University, now Concordia University.

2Layton does not recall the name of this individual as he had several private students at this time.
April 3, 1958

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your two postcards. I am glad to hear of all your activities & interests, & especially pleased to hear of Betty's success in being chosen for the Spring Show. I hear that all sorts of 'big names' were left out of the Show this year. We read Ayre's review in the Star, & were pleased to see his reference to Betty.

I am sending along the latest version of "The Lost Girl". I think I told you at Christmas that I had written this story, based vaguely on an experience at Cavendish Beach last summer, & I have been tinkering away at it ever since. I'm still not fully satisfied, & would welcome your comments.

Did I tell you that in going over my stories to collect those for my forthcoming book I realized that there was more unity among them than I had been conscious of? They are almost all studies in vulnerability. I have always been haunted by Eliot's line about "some infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing", & I see now that that notion runs through all my stories.

I have just had a letter from Saturday Review of Literature2 saying that although they ordinarily do not have space for reviews of Canadian books, they plan to review 10 Can Poets because they regard it "as a significant contribution to the study of Canadian literature." I hope the plan is realized.

How inept are most reviews in Canada! All the reviews of my book so far have been favourable, but so superficial. They could all have been written after reading the title & the introduction. The real merits & defects of the book are completely missed--even by Louis Dudek, though I'll admit he came nearer than anyone else so far. It makes me wonder whether to forget Canada & write my books on Lawrence & Woolf & Joyce for the English market.

Love,

Des P

enclosure: ms "The Lost Girl"


2William Patterson, letter to Desmond Pacey, 29 March 1958, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.
Dear Desmond,

Yes, I often wish Bet wd paint more. Like me, she’s really happy only when she’s working at a picture--beside the bang one gets when creating, everything else tends to blur into meaninglessness. Mind you, I don’t think it should: hang it, life isn’t art, and is a whole lot more important. Age may have something to do with it, but I’m beginning to think the literary life shadowy and unreal, ultimately unsatisfying as a way of living. Isn’t it more sensible to enjoy love than to write about it? It seems there’s no other way to create new life than by the death of a part of ourselves. Monstrous paradox! And yet, when Bet paints she’s in a fine humour all day; she leaves her tensions in the studio and closes the door on them.

I shall look forward to reading the review in SR of L. Your book is "a significant contribution to the study of Canadian literature". Don’t be too unhappy about the notices and reviews of it in this country: thank your good stars they’ve been favourable and let it go at that. There just aren’t enough good perceptive readers in your field, or it may be there aren’t enough outlets in this country to encourage a class of professional reviewers such as exists in Gt Britain and the USA. I hope your notion to abandon Cndn literature for Lawrence, Woolf and Joyce is a passing fancy, the black product of a momentary irritation. You’ve made an important place for yourself in the realm of Cndn criticism, it wd be folly to leave it for something as hackneyed and overdone as Joycean criticism. Or Woolfean. No, but you’re like me. You’ll beef, but you’ll go on on the road fate arranged for you.

"It lies inside one like a destiny".¹

There’ll be some new work of mine in the Cndn Forum in a couple of months from now.² The longish poem (84 lines) "An Errant Husband to Ovid" and a poem I’ve been working on since the end of summer, "Autumn Lines For My Son", as well as three or four others. I’m trying to induce Jonathan Williams to bring out A Laughter in the Mind in June instead of the fall, so as to clear my decks for a summer of prose writing. The book is dedicated to you and Mary.³

Here are my comments on "The Lost Girl". a) There’s too much description, particularly at the beginning, which is unanchored & floating: that is, the author’s. That makes for undramatic writing. b) It’s not a story, but an episode, the sort of thing your countrywoman, Katherine Mansfield,⁴ learned from Chekhov to do, and she was only occasionally successful. c) There isn’t enough interest developed to keep the reader reading from paragraph to paragraph. It wd be trite to say the story requires a conflict of some kind, but it wd be true and wd indicate where the trouble lies. I’m sorry I can’t be more enthusiastic, but I know you want my true feelings.

Love,
Irv

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2 These poems appeared in A Laughter in the Mind ("An Errant Husband to Ovid" was retitled "A Roman Jew to Ovid") but did not appear in the Forum; Layton had recently sent them there and was assuming publication.

3 A Laughter in the Mind bears the dedication "For Desmond and Mary."

4 Pacey and Mansfield were both natives of New Zealand.

158. [pc]
April 22, 1958

Dear Desmond,

Has FC shown you the all-Canadian number of Pan?1 He shd have received his two copies by now, though my own only arrived yesterday. Leonard Cohen, who was in NYC, was supposed to bring back my 200 copies with him, but now I learn he has gone up to Toronto for a poetry-cum-guitar appearance in one of the cabarets there. It might be weeks before I put my hands on the copies.

We rec’d a letter and some poems from Phyllis Webb.2 She appears to like Paris a great deal, especially its theatre life.3

Jargon Press is publishing A Laughter in the Mind this June. The bk is dedicated to you and Mary. Someone’s throat will be cut if anything goes wrong with the dedication this time. It’s a strong book, and I’m pleased with it. And now, for a long rest.

Love,
Irving


2Phyllis Webb, letter to Irving Layton, 11 April 1958, Layton Collection, Concordia University Library.

3Phyllis Webb lived in Paris for eighteen months 1957-58, financed in part by a Canadian Government Overseas Award.

159. April 23, 1958

Dear Irving,

Sorry to have been so long answering your letter of April 11. I could plead that I have been very busy preparing final examinations, finishing off courses (lectures end tomorrow) etc etc—but the real reason is that your contemptuous dismissal of my short story made me furious, and if I had written at once I should have blasted you out of your chair.
Even after almost two weeks cooling off, I feel annoyed with you. Are you so lacking in sensitivity that you can’t see the dimensions of this story? Now I’ll grant you that my story is open to criticism in detail, but to dismiss the whole thing as not having enough interest to keep the reader reading from paragraph to paragraph is to indict not me but yourself. "The story requires a conflict of some kind"—now, really, how stupid can you get? What more conflict would you want? It’s the whole bloody issue in miniature, the whole goddamned human & universal dilemma. It’s the conflict between pleasure & pain, between joy & sorrow, between the impulse to affirm & the impulse to deny, between innocence & experience, the light and the darkness. Can’t you see it? Here’s the kind of halcyon holiday that comes in rare moments—the sun is shining, the band is playing, the sea is sparkling, the lovers are loving, the children are playing, and even the old man, hump-backed to suggest his alienation (the last or second last phase of Yeats’ lunar cycle—the hunchback & the dwarf1), for once has the sense of belonging, has allowed himself to fall in love with innocence—and then the innocence turns to terror in his hands, he seeks to remould it to his heart’s desire, seems to succeed—only to be wounded by the mother (who should be the succourer but proves his destroyer)—and so the darkness gathers, the sea’s cold salt violence reassumes its true quality, & joy has once more fallen victim to pain. Now that’s only a rough & ready account of what I was trying to suggest, but it seems to me that even that should have justified you in taking the story more seriously than you did.

The excessive (?) description at the beginning was intended to suggest how universal (though temporary) is the impulse to affirm—through all the age groups, all the classes, etc etc. There may be too much of it, but a lot is essential if I’m to make my point. I think it must be general description—undramatic, as you call it. Don’t imagine that I didn’t consider that question, & wonder whether the scene might be described from the point of view of the old man or the young girl. But it seemed to me that what was needed here was a bird’s-eye-view, a panorama, in order to suggest that the mood is not that of one or two individuals but a general mood. I see the structure of the story as a sort of spiral or gyre—a double spiral—circumference of gaiety moving in to focus on the old man & the girl & then expanding again to the circumference of sand & dune.

I think the trouble is that you have convinced yourself that though I may be a fair critic, I’m a dud as a creative writer, & that therefore you didn’t give the story a chance. If it’s not potentially one of the best stories ever written in Canada, I’ll eat my hat.

As ever but more angry,
Des Pacey

PS Love to Betty
Phase Twenty-Eight... The natural man, the Fool desiring his Mask, grows malignant, not as the Hunchback... one finds his manystyles on passing from the village fool to the Fool of Shakespeare. MB Yeats, A Vision 181-82.

Dear Desmond,

I'll write you a letter when I return from Toronto—another Fighting Words1 exhibition. My letter may have been abrupt or curt, but where you find "contempt" in it, I'm unable to understand. I'm sorry it struck you that way, however—really sorry. If I've given you any pain, I ask you to excuse me. Put it down to impatience and bluntness, if you must put it down to anything.

Briefly: here, you confuse intuition with achievement; think, because you say so, all those memorable conflicts are apparent in the story. You say—see, the old man has a hump, ah, now Yeats has something to say abt that, then you shut your eyes and look mysterious. But that simply will not do. Is the child "real"? Is the old man "real"? Are they concrete living individuals into whose feelings we can enter and be moved by them? In short, have you written an abstract for a story, or the story itself? I insist, for all yr. bullying, that you've done the first.

Believe me, I love you all the more for exploding like that.

Irv

1 Fighting Words, CBC Television, 27 April 1958. (Panelists Irving Layton, Jean Tweed, Anthony Frisch and Reverend William Bothwell; moderator Nathan Cohen.)

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your card.

Fighting Words is back on our TV station, so we saw & heard you last Sunday. A very lively discussion—I thought you & Frisch were going to come to blows once or twice.

I'm enclosing Roy Daniells' foreword to my book of short stories. I should like this back as soon as possible, please, as it's the only copy in existence. You'll see that he, without any prompting on my part, saw at least the central significance of "The Lost Girl".1 I like the foreword very much, since it is unpretentious & yet suggestive & informative.

I don't want to be forced to the other extreme & make extravagant claims for my stories. I know that they are very minor examples of the art. But I do think that you have a prejudice, that you assume I can't write creatively & that you therefore refuse to see what merits the stories have. It may also be partly that the stories are very different from the kind you write, and indeed that they reflect an aspect of me that you don't like. I know that
they reflect only one part of me, and that not the part that most people see or like. Generally I am robust & vigorous & a bit too aggressive; in the stories I am tender, wistful, pathetic. But that is the way the stories naturally come out, & although I admire stories that have the vigour mine lack I should be dishonest if I wrote otherwise.

However--too much egotism!

Write soon & please return Daniells'.

Des P

enclosure: ts Roy Daniells, "Foreword" The Picnic

In his "Foreword" Daniells comments on Pacey's story:

In "The Lost Girl" the child is harried, the old man rebuffed and insulted, the sun is sinking into a cold and restless sea. But the brief contact between the little girl and her rescuer, the momentary nexus of compassion and trust, of reassurance and the consciousness of usefulness, shines out unclouded. Individuals are all fearfully vulnerable... (8-9).

162. May 10, 1958

Dear Desmond,

The "Foreword" by Daniells ties up your talents in a smart bundle—he has the core of you down pat. His essay is a fine thing, and I warmly agree with his sentiments and appraisals. I wish I could persuade you I bear your short stories no ill will, but after all my strictures I could more easily convince you that shrimps whistle or robins pick their noses. If you were here we could bat this thing around more sensibly, having a care for the spiky edges of your vanity or mine, but letters are bloody hopeless. They say too much or not enough.

My dissatisfaction with "The Lost Girl" stems from the feeling I have that you do not carry the reader into the lives of the old man and the little girl. It's the job of the writer to make his characters convincing, so that the reader feels their emotions and is moved by whatever moves them, before he treats them as symbols. In art the unique is the symbolic, and that is how the circle is squared. Your humpbacked old man and lost little girl are little more than shadowy outlines, ghostly hangers that simply will not support the solid intentions of your story. Daniells is interested in one thing, I in another. I ask myself, "How good is it as a STORY and put aside metaphysics, ethics and abstractions, things that weigh much too heavily with our academic kinsfolk in this country. So don't be angry with me, and don't suppose I dislike the shy, tender and vulnerable "I" behind the successful critic and the aggressive department head. You and I are like two peas in a pod, as a careful rereading of my own stories, especially "Vacation in La Voiselle" or "Death in the Family" will quickly persuade you.

I'd be a lot happier with your story if it were less static—pictures on a wall but not live film. It strikes me as a scissors-and-paste job, and I grant you the cardboard
is stiff and sometimes prettily-coloured and will stand up all right. But don't let anyone breathe too hard. For me the test of any poem or story is—what happens when a rhinoceros sneezes?

All my love to Mary, and you too, stinker,
Irv

163. [pc]  
May 19, 1958
Dear Desmond,

Blood and bones—that's what I want, the stale sweat of humanity. I take my models for writing from the Old Testament. Abstract, symbolic art leaves me unmoved. But my way of looking at things is NOT the only way. There are many who think Eliot a great poet, and an even greater dramatist. I don't. I admire his craft, but I think him a decidedly minor figure, and I do so for the same reason I place his hero, Dante,¹ below Shakespeare—he cannot "feel" people, and for all his fine talk has no real dramatic flair. But, as I say, different people, different views! If some sharpness has crept into my voice, please excuse it on the grounds of my being sacked two weeks ago for union activities.²

Yrs,
Irv


²Layton was fired briefly from Herzliah in the Spring of 1958 "when he had led the teacher's federation in drafting a letter to the board of directors of the United Talmud Torahs about the use of the school telephone." (Elspeth Cameron, Irving Layton: a Portrait 299).

164.  
May 22, 1958
Dear Irving,

The last sentence in your postcard of May 19 disturbs me—have you really been fired from your teaching job for union activities? If so, I am very sorry indeed. Surely that kind of thing can't happen in this day & age! Let's not argue any more about my story. I quite agree with you about the superiority of flesh & blood to myth or allegory. I didn't set out to write the latter. As always, I saw something which moved me deeply & I wanted to preserve (& clarify & order) my own emotion & communicate it to others. The stuff about Yeats' phases etc was just something that I saw as a kind of aura about the story—but the basic thing was an act of compassion which was mocked. Now you weren't moved by the story—& Daniells was. Well, that's a .500 batting average & more than any one can expect.

And I certainly don't pretend to rival you in creative energy & talent. I want to believe that I have a modicum—but you have a major talent, I at best a minor one.
But if you want to be amused by the way in which minor talents can be inflated by judicious puffing, do look at the May 17 issue of Saturday Review1--on p.40 you'll find an article which makes Fredericton sound like the New Jerusalem & Mary & me like two of its prophets! I'm especially pleased that Mary got a bit of publicity. Of course the whole thing is grossly exaggerated.

In haste, to catch the mail.
Do write more fully about your troubles--or joys!

As ever,
Des


Dear Desmond,

I've been re-instated--that's the good news for now. After an interview with the Chairman of the Board of Education, and another with the Educational Director, the thing has been finally straightened out. The Chairman's grudge against me stemmed from a letter I wrote him several months earlier at the request of my colleagues protesting an order which forbade the use of the telephone to the teachers. This singled me out as a ringleader, and the protests of one or two irate parents against my "corrupting" influence didn't help much--in short, I fell under the suspicion of being a Red, a dangerous character with disturbing opinions. Moreover, I was the editor of the Bulletin,1 one or two copies of which I sent you. And active on the Executive of the Teacher's Federation. Add all those things up and it doesn't smell good--in the nostrils of the business types who run community affairs here as in other cities and towns of our lovely North American continent!

The school where I teach is a parochial one, in theory very Orthodox. And my Jewishness is neither parochial nor orthodox. As long as I was an obscure nobody, my views and opinions called for no investigation or surveillance. Now the question of my "influence" becomes rather important, especially to the rabbinical and conservative-minded who would be a lot happier if I were situated elsewhere. Of course, my being in Herzlia, my teaching there five days in the week, has been an anomaly--for me, a lucky one because it gave me both the leisure and impetus to write. The pharisees wd like to be rid of me, the more extreme ones very much so, but how slough off Canada's "most controversial poet" and some wd say her best, without raising a hue and a cry? Not to be done. Not only my colleagues--bless their loyal hearts--but all the pupils in the school wd have gone out on strike. And there wd have been repercussions in the Jewish community itself.
So for the time being the axe hasn’t fallen. But one day it will. I know how these gentlemen work, or what their worth is, or their purpose. I haven’t read Isaiah all these years for nothing. The pharisees may change their names or dress: but their barbarous ways endure forever. They have a genius or shd I say a hound’s smell for sniffing out anyone who wishes to be independent, responsible yet free. It’s becoming more and more difficult to be that--if a man walks with his head erect, chop his neck off! That seems to be the great burning passion of our time. These are mad times we live in: everywhere men and women are themselves running to put up the bars of their cages, the walls of the compounds that will confine them. Our dependence upon one another grows and with it grows our need to favor, cajole, mollify. The smell of lambskins drying in the sun---pungent and becoming universal! I’d like to see some of our critics address themselves to this problem. We need good writers as never before; those with honest passion in them, courage, wisdom and dignity. Not snivellers wailing blue murder---how much infantile sadism, masochism and homosexuality modern literature reveals.

Well, altogether this year takes the frosting of the cake. It’s been the most eventful, most painful, and in some ways the most profitable year of my life. My mother’s illness (at present she’s at the Old People’s Home, but the rumblings are beginning to swell), Bet’s, and recently the loss of my position. However, I look well, am taking up weightlifting & calisthenics, and am as cheerful as ever. Two things I must do: 1) Save enough money to buy myself a farm so that I can be truly independent and 2) Live more and write less. In fact, to hell with writing for the next three years!

Love to you & Mary,
Irving

1 Layton was editor of the Bulletin of the Montreal Jewish Teachers’ Federation.

2 The self—righteous hypocrisy (later termed “phariseism” after the Pharisees of the New Testament) of Israel is a frequent complaint of the prophet Isaiah: “Thy princes are faithless, companions of thieves: they all love bribes, they run after rewards. They judge not for the fatherless: and the widow’s cause cometh not in to them.” 1:23.

3 The Old People’s Shelter and Home on Esplanade in downtown Montreal.

June 17, 1958
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of June 1, which I received on my return from Edmonton on June 12. I’m very glad to hear that you’ve been reinstated in your job, & trust that none of your fears about subsequent developments will be realized.

Sorry I didn’t manage to get speaking to you between planes on my way out on June 4, but it was nice that I was
able to speak to Betty & to hear from her that you were in good health & spirits. I meant to call again on my way back, but I had a very brief stopover on the 12th & didn’t have time to call anybody.

I had a very nice time in Edmonton, mainly confabbing with old friends such as Roy Daniells, Norrie Frye, Murdo MacKinnon, A.S.P. Woodhouse, Reg Watters, etc etc, & really getting to know for the first time such relative newcomers as Miller MacLure, Milton Wilson, Ron Bates of Western, Hoeniger of Vic etc. Wilson gave a paper on recent Can poetry at a session I chaired, & he spoke very favourably of your work. Bates has just had his first volume of poems accepted by Macmillan, & I read his poems in manuscript & liked them very much. Daniells & I had some fine walks & talks, as did Frye & I.

I was at several parties in private homes in Edmonton, including one at Eli Mandel’s, & another at Henry Kreisel’s.

I suppose you read Munro Beattie’s long review of Ten Can Poets in the June Forum. I’d call it a grudging review—professional jealousy, perhaps—but it’s a fair assessment for all that. Some of his adverse criticisms I would accept—others are arguable.

I’ve just read the page proofs of my Picnic & Other Stories, so I suppose it’ll be out in a few weeks.

What about your book of poems?

Mary & I were down to Rothesay yesterday, where I addressed the graduating class at the Collegiate School. We were taken out for a delightful dinner at the Country Club afterwards. She (Mary) sends her love to both you & Bet—as do I.

As ever,
Des

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1The Association of Canadian Teachers of English met at the University of Alberta in Edmonton June 9, 10 and 11, 1958.

2Murdoch ("Murdo") McKinnon, Professor of English at the University of Toronto.

3A.S.P. Woodhouse (1895-1964), scholar and Professor of English at the University of Toronto, founder and editor for ten years of the "Letters in Canada" survey in the University of Toronto Quarterly (a periodical he edited for thirteen years); author of Puritanism and Liberty (1938).

4Ronald Bates (b. 1924), poet, critic and Professor of English at the University of Western Ontario; author of The Wandering World (1959) and Northrop Frye (1971).

5F. David Hoeniger, Professor of English at Victoria College, University of Toronto.


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9Hunro Beattie (b. 1911), Professor of English at Carleton 1942–present; co-author (with Elizabeth Waterston) of Composition for Canadian University Students, and author of the three chapters on modern poetry in the Literary History of Canada (2nd ed., 1976).


June 30, 1958

Dear Desmond,

Thanks for your chatty letter. Wilson is both deep and sensitive—perhaps not so "brilliant" as Frye, but in the judging of poetry brilliancy can be a decided handicap—something to be overcome. I have the greatest admiration for Frye's intellectual attainments, but I still think he missed the bus as far as the modern poetry movement in Canada was concerned. His book The Anatomy of Criticism1 is both brilliant & suggestive—I have read chapters in it with feelings approaching something like awe—but it finally boils down to something like an irrelevancy. It's not intellect that makes poetry but emotion, a mysterious sixth sense, and that's where Frye's middle finger is lacking. To attempt, as Frye does, a catalogue of the freshening spirit is to mistake the table of contents for the poetry itself.

Did you see Kenner's article in this month's issue of Poetry?2 I'm expecting A Laughter in the Mind daily. You know how these printers are—they're more unreliable than poets. McClelland & Stewart are publishing my Collected Poems in January 1959.3 I've got to write a "Foreword" to it.

I'll write again. Love to you and Mary.

Irv


3Layton is referring to his selected poems—A Red Carpet for the Sun; McClelland and Stewart published Layton's Collected Poems in 1965 and again in 1971.

July 16, 1958

Dear Irving,

I am very busy with Summer School work, but must take time to write & thank you for A Laughter, which arrived to my great delight this morning. I immediately took it across the campus to Mary, who was painting in the Art Centre, & we shared the thrill of seeing your dedication to us.1 That is
a very great compliment which we both appreciate to the full.

I then took the book in to the Faculty Club, where it passed from hand to hand & was read aloud in snatches by various professors. Several people expressed the desire to buy copies, so I hope the local bookstore will be having some in stock soon.

I haven’t time now to make a detailed analysis of the poems, & I dare say I shall have the opportunity to review it for some magazine or other. Suffice it to say that I like the format of the book very much, and that after reading all poems through once & some of them two or three times I found none which I did not enjoy. You seem to be at the top of your form throughout. Moreover, the poems wear well. Many of them I’ve read before, yet I reread them with pleased excitement. It’s a very varied book of course, but I think you have been equally successful with the tender & thoughtful poems on the one hand, & the gay & rollicking ones on the other.

I’ll try & write again soon, but I am devilishly busy. I have eighteen people in my class in Creative Writing, & that in itself keeps me busy reading & correcting. But in addition I have seventeen in a graduate course on American Literature of the 19th C, & a dozen in a graduate course on the 18th Century English novel. I’ve also foolishly taken on several more hack jobs--articles for the Encyclopaedia Brittanica on Can literature, a review of The Culture of Contemporary Canada for QQ, and a little anthology of New Brunswick poetry for the book The Arts in NB.

Mary is busy painting with Alfie Pinsky’s Summer School class, & working practically night & day at it. She’s developing by leaps & bounds & enjoying a new lease on life. However I don’t want to whine--I actually get a great kick out of teaching, & there’s at least a vicarious creativity about it.

Love!

All the best to yourself & Bet,
from Des & Mary

1See 157.3.

2Pacey did not review A Laughter in the Mind.


Dear Desmond,

What sort of summer are you having? You're not teaching, I hope. I haven't heard any more about your book of short stories—wasn't it supposed to be out about now? They add up, your stories, and what they add up to is the sensitive, compassionate individual that is behind them. Your "Picnic" has all the delicacy of a Chopin nocturne, an anguish that goes beyond the power of words to express. I get the same feeling when looking at Picasso's "Mountebanks". I also get that feeling on certain rainy mornings, when the raindrops drop slow and white on the windowsill and your entire nervous system seems to shatter deliciously at this melancholy sound. It's a sorrow for everything that's wrong and twisted in this world... but I'd better save all this for a poem.

Well, I'm done with the "Foreword" McClelland & Stewart wanted me to do for my Collected. It isn't the usual kind of thing; at least, I've never come across another foreword just like it. It's hard-hitting, and though it runs to only about 1200 words, it packs a lot of meat between the punctuation marks. What's more, it gives the reader some clues to the poetry that follows. If I can say so, I think I know my poetry better than anyone else does, at least I know the "obsessions" out of which it has sprung, and if the Greeks are right in thinking of the poet as a "shaper", just what it is I've tried to shape. Plato thought the poet was an inspired idiot. Some critics, including yourself, have thought of me as a happy nature boy with a wide lecherous grin on my face and my fly unzipped for action. After this foreword, it will no longer be possible for them to do so. I shall at any rate have made them aware of the shadows that occasionally fall across the satin pillow cases.

Weak in criticism? I think that's true about your book. But since you don't set yourself up to be a critic— you're a literary historian—this shouldn't rattle you, you've written a goddamn good book. You haven't been afraid to stick your neck out, and I think your evaluations, as apart from your insights, will stand. That is, I think you're stronger in the generalities than you are in the particulars. You've provided the intelligent reader with an excellent roadmap in which the main highway has been inked in good and black. Did I say, weak in criticism? Not that so much, now that I think of it again, but weak in interpretation. I think that that's your one vulnerable spot, your Achilles' heel. In heaven's name, don't think I'm going snooty on you when I say this. No one knows better than I, how hard it is to get the "feel" of a poem, what a complex, many-sided organism a poem is, and how impossible it is to paraphrase its multiple meanings. If
every poem is some kind of a miracle, it’s an even greater miracle to put down on paper a prose interpretation of it. Still, it’s your lack of interpretative power which made you take exception to the final line of "The Bull Calf" ("I turned away and wept") for you thought it was the common sentiment of pity which made me weep, pity for the slain Bull Calf. The real theme of the poem, however, is that art is a kind of death (see my "Cote des Neiges Cemetery") and that death is meaningless. It is because the animal is "bereft of pride" that it now has perfection and beauty. My tears, if I may say so, are no ordinary tears.

I suppose you’ve seen the Time piece on me and my collaborator, Aviva Cantor. Pay no attention to it. We, on this side of the Cold War, have no more respect for the individual’s conscience and integrity than the Russians we condemn so self-righteously have. I never said I had "less and less time for serious verse" (or something to that effect) nor did I say "I felt my self ensnared". These are complete fabrications, as spurious as Mr Luce himself. The fact is, I never had more time in my whole life than I do now for serious writing, and feel with Rabbi Ben Ezra "that the best is yet to be". As for being "ensnared"—what poppycock! My sole reason for writing a musical review is that I’m having loads of blessed fun doing it—and nothing else. My lyrics are doggerel, some of it damn good, which says the same things I’ve said in serious verse. If I can get thousands of people humming my words, there’s no telling the kind of revolution I might set in motion. Some of the numbers are pretty sharp, particularly the one about psychiatrists. I’ve got some of them on demonstration records; if you’re ever this way again you’ll hear them. Unless of course RCA Victor or some other recording company decides they’re commercial possibilities, and then I can mail them to you.

Did you receive your copy of A Laughter in the Mind? I mailed it to you several days ago. Thank goodness, the dedication to you and Mary didn’t get rubbed off or lost or somethin’. It finally made it—after all these years and all these unsuccessful tries! If anything had gone wrong this time, I think I wd have shit myself or chartered a plane to Asheville and shot the printers. I hope you and Mary like the book.

Well, Bet and I have finally made a clean break. We’ve now legally separated. I’ll ask one thing only of you and Mary: don’t believe any of the rumours you might hear, they’re bound to be wrong. For now, I want to put three things before you. Firstly, for all my praise of Venus, I was never unfaithful to Bet until I met the woman I am now living with. She is the "little one" of my poems, and I love her dearly. Secondly, the separation was desired as much by Bet as by me; and, finally, Bet and I are happier than we have been for a long, long time. The root of the trouble was an emotional and temperamental incompatibility. Though we love and admire each other, and see each other
quite often, we now know that living together is impossible. Believe me, it has been an agonizing period for both of us, but we’ve come through it. The nightmare of indecision, of self-reproach, and mutual recriminations is now behind us, and we are both better and more sensible people for the ordeal we’ve both been through. My present unconventional way of living will, I hope, end in the near future, once I’ve cleaned a few things out of the way and settled the prospects of my children. Bet says she’d like to go to New York and take them with her—that’s the one outstanding difference between us. However, I think we’ll reach a satisfactory agreement on that issue as well.

These are the bare outlines of the story. I tell it to you and Mary because since you’re friends of ours I feel you have the right to know. I know you want us both to be happy, and that, we now are. The children, I think, will not suffer too much since Bet and I have them uppermost in our minds. Since my departure, Bet has taken to painting and drawing with all her former vigour. I expect great things from her—and you and Mary can from me.

Love from Aviva and me,
Irving

1Pablo Picasso, The Mountebanks (1905), National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

2Irving Layton, "Foreword," A Red Carpet for the Sun np.

3The English "poet" comes from the Greek word meaning maker or shaper.

4Plato notes in his Phaedrus that "The third kind is the madness of those who are inspired by the Muses; this enters into a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical and all other numbers..." He develops this view at greater length in his Ion: "For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him."

5Layton is perhaps thinking of Frye’s comment, "one can get as tired of buttocks in Mr. Layton as of buttercups in the Canadian Poetry Magazine" in his review of The Black Huntsmen ("Letters in Canada 1951" 255), and Pacey’s remarks in his review of The Bull Calf (see 26.2): "He is the one Canadian poet I know who can really celebrate the sexual act...Layton sees sex everywhere—the water in which he is bathing becomes a caressing woman, young ferns are as ‘wispy as a twelve-year-old’s pudendal hair.’" (31-32)

6Layton refers to remarks from Beattie’s review:
The study of A.M. Klein, on the other hand, is defective on the critical side...Most readers, I expect, will find these essays more satisfactory as biography than as criticism...It seems to me clear that Dr Pacey has less competence as a critic than he has as a biographer and chronicler. Munro Beattie; see 157.10.

7Pacey praised Layton’s poem, taking exception with the final line:
The keynote is struck in the title poem, which is a tender tribute to a slaughtered calf. It is a magnificent poem, slightly marred by the final line, "I turned away and wept," which simply makes explicit what the whole poem had sufficiently implied.(30)
Dear Desmond,

Your letter came in this morning’s mail. I’m very glad ALITM pleases both you & Mary, the two persons I know I’d most want it to give pleasure. The book is something of a mixture, but I think the general level is quite high—there isn’t a poem in it I haven’t worked at to the limits of patience and ability. Emery Neff\(^1\) wrote Louis D\(^2\) that he was particularly impressed with "Chatterers" (when it first appeared in Delta\(^3\)) and I’m enclosing a letter from Hugh Kenner\(^4\) which I rec’d after I had enclosed a QQ reprint of "Cain"\(^5\) along with the permission he wanted for the use of "Golfers" in a book he’s doing. I’m mighty pleased he wants to include "Cain" as well.\(^6\) Imagine me—in a textbook!!!

Your enthusiasm for my book makes my grudging treatment of "The Lost Girl" look pretty sick. The truth is you’re a good writer, with plenty of creative guts. But when your story arrived I was in the middle of an emotional tangle—even Shakespeare would have seemed pretty tame to me at the time. Now I’m restored to my normal cheerfulness, and everything looks very bright once more. It was a hard decision to make; but now, having made it, I also think it was a wise and courageous one. I saw Bet last night and she looked serene and contented.

I wrote "Divinity"\(^7\) two days ago. My little one and I are very, very happy. I love her deeply.

One day when you’re passing through Montreal again, I shall give you a parcel containing the letters I wrote Aviva during the time she was in Boston and New York. Our story is a beautiful one and I should not want it besmirched or distorted. It’s because I have great faith in your judgement and integrity that I wish you to have these letters: I know you will use them with discretion and understanding.
And what do you think of the ME now? Was I such a bad analyst? History condemns the stupid to repeat its lessons.9

Love to you & Mary,
Irving

enclosure: ts "Divinity" (ms: Irving Layton, July 17,1958) and letter from Hugh Kenner.

1Emery Neff (1892-1983), educator and author, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, author of Carlyle and Mill (1924) and A Revolution in European Poetry (1940).


4Hugh Kenner, letter to Irving Layton, 9 July 1958, Layton Papers, Concordia University Library.


7Layton, "Divinity," A Laughter in the Mind 41.

8Layton may be referring to the growing relationship between Egypt and the Soviet Union (see 135.4) in the form of trade exchanges and loans, and to the ongoing insurrection in Lebanon and Lebanese complaints to the UN that the United Arab Republic was intervening in its affairs.

9Layton is paraphrasing George Santayana’s famous assertion: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." The Life of Reason V vols. (New York: Scribners, 1905) I: 284.

July 22, 1958

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your two letters, the Kenner letter, & the lively poem.

It was kind of you to say so many nice things about my stories. I have had no word of the book lately, but I expect it will be out next month & I shall send you a copy as soon as I have some. I hope you will feel that the stories add up to a coherent & honest (if strictly limited) vision.

I shall be looking forward to your Collected Poems from McClelland & Stewart. Your foreword sounds most interesting. I don’t think I’ve ever thought of you or described you as a happy nature boy with his fly unzipped etc—I’ve always insisted on the complexity of your work, and in particular on its combination of anger & compassion, toughness & tenderness. However, we won’t quibble about that.
By "weak in criticism" I take it you are referring to Munro Beattie's *Forum* review. Well, who the hell is he to judge? As usual, there's a story behind the story. I hear via the grapevine that Beattie was himself working on a similar book¹ & is annoyed that I stole his thunder. Being a fairly honest guy he couldn't pan mine completely, but he did seek to damn it with faint praise. No-one can possibly dispute the originality & truth of my biographical research, so the only target is my criticism. Since criticism is always to some degree a matter of taste, one is not taking much of a risk in disputing its validity.

While on this general subject, let me mention the *Times Lit Supp* review of my book--on July 4.² Did you see it? If not, for God’s sake look at it. It will make your blood boil. It's not so much an attack on me as on Canadian poetry, which it writes off as useless. All Canadian poets are mere improvisers etc. I've written an angry letter of protest,³ & I hope you will too. Doesn't it strike you that this would be a splendid way to get some free publicity for Canadian poetry? If enough of us wrote letters, & got a real controversy going in the correspondence columns of *TLS*, we could really put Can. poetry on the map. Will you write, & get Louis & others to do the same?

I forgot to mention the *Time* piece in my last letter. Mary & I were amused by it. I didn't take it too seriously, as I know that *Time* is almost always wrong. They have a facility for just avoiding libel but suggesting libellous implications.

To come to your amatory & marital affairs—I really haven't much to say as I don't know the situation well enough. I have always found Betty a very lovable person, & I can't help feeling very sorry for her. However I know that two fine people can sometimes rub one another the wrong way & live in a state of perpetual tension. I certainly do not condemn you, and I readily believe that you have sought to do your best for everybody concerned. Since I have never even met Aviva, I have no idea what sort of person she is—except that I'm sure you would not be attracted unless she had many good qualities.

I don't think this business should or will affect our friendship in any way. Mary & I are not censorious types, & we both have enough imagination to be tolerant & sympathetic. I've guessed for some time that you were going through some emotional upheaval, but I've deliberately refrained from mentioning it. I knew that you would tell me about it when the time was ripe, & you have done so.

We've received a $1500 grant from the Canada Council for the expansion of the *Fiddlehead*. We hope to expand both its contents & its circulation. And I (though this is strictly on the qt⁴) have received a $1500 raise for next year!!

All the best--& do think seriously about TLS! Love from Mary.

As ever, Des
Dear Desmond,

Have finished a longish poem which I’ve sent off to the Queen’s Quarterly. It’s titled "For Mao Tse Tung: A Meditation on Flies and Kings"¹ and was, I suppose, started by the article on Mao’s poetry in the current number of the QQ,² although the ideas have been fermenting in my head for a long time. In a way, you may call the poem my answer to the Christianized poetry of Western Europe (T.S.E’s "Four Quartets"³ I find ridiculously parochial; but he’s only the latest, not the worst offender). In my bones, I feel it’s all up with what has been grandly known as Western European civilization, and that from now on, and increasingly so in the future, the cultures of the East and the Middle East will make their impact felt on all our philosophies and religious affirmations. Christianity is dead; but so are all the other religions that stress suffering and pity as an ethic, and a divine providence as a metaphysic. Apart from Zen Buddhism, all the other varieties of Buddhism have had it too. They’re in the same boat as Christianity, and for the same reasons. In my poem I oppose the Christian ethic with another: that of the heroic acceptance of the tragic wheel of necessity (fire is my symbol for that) and the forging of values by the individual in the face of blank meaninglessness. Here are the last eight or nine lines of the poem.

Enter this tragic forest where the pines
uprear as if for the graves of humans
all capacity and desire to offend
with themselves finally done;
And mark the dark pines further on,
The sun’s fires touching them at will,
Assembled stillly, like fateful Khans,
And mourning, serene and monarchical,
Their Lord entombed in the burning hill.

The bold touch or stroke here, is the use of the word "Lord", which together with "entombed", recalls the Lord Jesus, but in the poem stands for his complete and uncompromising opposite.
In addition to this poem, I’ve written three very beautiful lyrics, one, "A Bonnet for Bessie," which is definitely experimental, and another, "Love Is An Irrefutable Fire" that I think one of the loveliest and most moving lyrics I’ve ever written. I’ve sent them off to the Canadian Forum and they ought to appear together with two more poems (one of them is "Divinity") in the October issue. I’ve also finished my "Foreword" to the Collected poems, and now there is only the last minute revisions and changes, if any, of the poems themselves.

And then, I’m through with poetry! For a year or two anyway. Either that, or it’ll be the looney bin for me. Now that the Collected is coming out in January, the demon inside me ought to be appeased, and be willing to be quiescent for awhile. Lately I’ve begun to feel like the Sorcerer’s apprentice, as if someone had put a hex on me. I nearly lose my job, I lose my wife—but I still go on writing poetry. Madness, I tell you. Madness.

Excuse the outburst. What do you think of the following as possible titles for the Collected poems:
1. Arrogant, The One-Armed Juggler
2. Visions and Predicaments
3. The Theoretical Nipple

I have Max and Sissyboo with me up here. Today I had a great time with them, swimming and boating and taking them for a long jaunt along the road that leads into a forest that literally is next door to us. Aviva is in New York and I do all the cooking and cleaning up for them and myself. My two bairns are wonderful, and I blow up with fatherly pride every time I look at them. Max and Naomi both have their mother’s good looks, but their temperament is mine. The chief reason I have resolved to abandon the writing of poetry, temporarily at least, is that I wish to spend the next few years with them; I don’t want them to be estranged from me. I want them to remember me as a father, and not as someone who was too busy or too abstracted to notice them. They deserve the best that I or anyone else can give them.

Many, many thanks for your understanding letter. Bet and I love and admire each other, but temperamentally we just can’t hit it off. This way it’s easier. Regards and love to Mary.

Love,
Irving

closure: "Love is an Irrefutable Fire," "A Bonnet for Bessie," and the following untitled discussion of vocabulary and glossary for "A Bonnet for Bessie:"

Although a genius and an excellent linguist, Joyce was on the wrong track. His Finnegans Wake is a monument to literary futility—an imposing cul-de-sac. Concerned with the origin of words, with their syllabic suggestiveness, he did not see that the next step in linguistic evolution must be the discovery of situational words in which all
languages, including English, are necessarily poor and undeveloped. What, for example, is the word that might express the relationship between an unwed mother and a social worker with a presbyterian conscience? The word for a man picking his nose while his wife is reading the latest volume by Bertrand Russell? For a grown-up daughter’s emotions at finding herself in the same room with her mother’s lover? To my knowledge, Joyce never tackled this problem.

I am certain the future belongs to the genius who will learn to telescope a multitude of complex situations into evocative words so that extremely subtle states of being can be expressed and communicated. His abbreviations will be rapid and intuitive; he will need not only a word-sense—something all poets must have—but also a world-sense. His inventions will be rooted in an experience much more mentalized than we know today. In the light of these expectations, the typographical experiments of some of our poets strike me as naive and futile; ditto for the concern with common speech, the much-hoorayed goal of modern poetry. As for Eliot’s sorrowful fumbling with language in the shadow of a monastery, this is only fuddy-duddy ing, impressive to Anglican acolytes. Linguistically, it is quite worthless. I’ve heard young lecturers in English when they’re stoned talk that way, never any humans. Moreover, the ideas and attitudes are stale and literary: language-wise they lead nowhere, though with dignity and self-assurance.

Another point needs to be made. Much of our vocabulary is still pre-Freudian and theological, God-centred. We need words to express the impact of both psychoanalysis and modern science upon the human psyche; words that will communicate new awarenesses and sensitivities. The vocabulary must be found to bring our subtilized emotional states into closer correspondence with our mental perceptions of them. There could be no greater failure than to allow our ideas to outstrip our feelings, and this I think is what is beginning to happen. Here, the poets have served us not at all. For the most part they’ve been content to use the current language without much invention or alertness to the linguistic needs of the moment. Their stock literary themes have been no fresher than the language they used. Oblivion awaits them all. This is a revolutionary age; not only Arab kings but poets must expect to find themselves swiftly dethroned. But this is too gloomy a subject for me to pursue.

Fruitful experimentation will have to follow along the lines of my poem, A BONNET FOR BESSIE. The possibilities are unlimited and depend only on the inventiveness, world-sense, and aural genius of the poet. A word of warning: only the incorrigibly dull-witted will confuse what I’ve done with
the 'private references' of the Auden-Spender-Lewis group in
the thirties. Word-minting is not new. The test is still
whether the new word can get itself accepted and used. The
novelty in my effort is that it points out the direction the
poet of tomorrow will have to take. Confronted by an
America that only the wildest had ever imagined or dreamed
of, the Elizabethans coined thousands of new words to
express its impact upon their altered psyches. Our age is
in every way a much more revolutionary one, and our verbal
needs are that much greater.

A BONNET FOR BESSIE

Bonnet: a poem of sixteen lines
Bessie: an unknown splinter
Splinter: a ten-year-old
Promise: a splinter's bottom
Hoper: one who sells fruit on the roadside
Prod: a salesman, or idea man
Chime: to come off together sexually
Bread: an unimaginative but reliable provider
Smit: purposefully sentimental
Noggler: one who rhapsodizes over obvious beauties of
nature, e.g. sunsets
Rimer: one who poetizes for purposes of seduction
Jack: one who boasts of his good fortune to make others
unhappy
Jill: someone who slyly pretends to ill-fortune to make
others happy
Dome: to pray
Joseph: a poet
Garlic: love
Brave: to create an illegitimate child
Cloisterer: someone who out of respect for his beloved
performs his less attractive animal functions in private;
for example, burping, passing wind, etc
Rub the plate: to season one's life with happiness and zest
Poorlou: to feel superior to one's friends through pitying
them
Mortgaged: married
Publer: a poet seeking publicity
Leonards: life-loving people
Fayes: used tea-bags
Growl: to say what one means
Shih: to be happy in secret for fear of joy-destroying
humans. Used as a password by the Stendhalian 'happy few'
Fly: a sickly sentimentalist
Diaper: to fulfill oneself through care and concern for
one's beloved
Vladimir: an erection. Those who are Tories are at liberty
to call it 'Winston'

2 Ping-ti Ho, "Two Major Poems by Mao Tse-Tung—a Commentary with Translations," Queen’s Quarterly LXV.2 (summer 1958): 251–62.

3 See 136.6.


5 Layton, "Love is an Irrefutable Fire," A Laughter in the Mind 18–19.

6 See 172.1.

7 The sorcerer’s apprentice discovers a spell that makes objects do his clean-up work—with disastrous results. The story was popularized by Disney’s Fantasia (1940), which incorporates the music of the same name by 19th century French composer Dukas, and originated in Goethe’s ballad "Der Zauberlehrling" which was inspired by a passage in Lucian.

8 The volume was titled A Red Carpet for the Sun.

173. September 8, 1958
Dear Irving,

Thanks for yours of Aug 8, which arrived just as we were about to leave for our holiday on PEI.

I hope you got Mary’s letter written from the Island & addressed to Côte St. Luc, & the copy of my book of short stories which I sent off a few days ago.

Ronald Everson was down here a few days ago & we had a nice chat with him over morning coffee. He’s a great admirer of yours, so we had much in common.

What did you think of "Darekill" Dobbs slambang attack on me in the new issue of Tamarack? I’ve already received several letters of defence & encouragement from people like F.R. Scott & Roy Daniells, so I guess the net effect of the review will be to Dobbs’ disadvantage. But such attacks are salutary—they put you on your mettle, & stop you from becoming complacent. I expect the stories will be attacked even more vehemently by such people, but to hell with them.

Your new poems sound very exciting. And I simply can’t believe that you are through with poetry—you’re no more through with poetry than I’m through with fucking. And when I’m through with that, brother, I might as well be dead! Talking of religion, I think we should go back to the old fertility rites and worship the phallus & the yoni. I seriously believe that there is something in those old cults.

I like Visions & Predicaments best of the titles, & the Theoretical Nipple least. The latter would be fun, but a joke that would soon grow stale, I fear. (Sorry, my ballpoint has gone dry).
We had a good holiday on the island. Mary painted almost constantly, & finished four oils & half-finished two others. She's working on figures now, & did some beauties of fishermen mending nets, harvesters in the field, etc. She gets better all the time & I fall more & more deeply in love with her all the time. The last few weeks have been like a honeymoon—boy, have we had some sessions! I don't think sex reveals its full possibilities until you've been having it together for about twenty years & have discovered all the subtle variations that most suit the individual temperament & physique!

Tonight we go to see the movie version of Desire Under The Elms, & tomorrow night we attend a dinner given by Lord Beaverbrook for the visiting representatives of Commonwealth universities.

My eldest boy, who worked as a reporter for the Gleaner all summer, has been asked to stay on part-time while finishing high school this winter. He'll work Friday afternoons & Sat mornings. He's done some swell stories & we are very proud of him.

Glad you so enjoyed your children on their holiday.

All the best,

Des Pacey

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1 Fugitive.

2 Ronald (R.G.) Everson (b. 1903), poet (A Lattice for Momos 1958; The Dark Is Not So Dark 1969) and public relations executive.


4 F.R. Scott, letter to Desmond Pacey, 3 Sept. 1958, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

5 Roy Daniells, letter to Desmond Pacey, 3 Sept. 1958, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

6 Pacey switches to pencil at this point.


8 William Maxwell Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook (1879–1964), New Brunswick native who became one of England's leading newspaper owners (The Daily Express, Sunday Express and The Evening Standard) and politicians, serving as Minister of Information (1918), Minister for Aircraft Production (1940–41), Minister of State (1941), Minister of Supply (1941–42) and Lord Privy Seal (1943–45).

9 Philip
Dear Desmond,

This is just to let you know your book came and that I’m grateful to you for it and for the very kind inscription you wrote in it.1 The book’s a beauty—Ryerson’s improving. I’m re-reading the stories very carefully, and like what I have already read. Your simplicity is most delusive.

Thank Mary for me for the fine letter she sent me. What’s your home address, so that I can reply to it?

After telling you I was going to lay off poetry for awhile I went ahead and wrote two more poems, both of them fine pieces, I think. They’re titled "Young Girls Dancing at Camp Lajoie",2 and "My Flesh Comfortless".3 The latter is the best thing I did this summer—I’m very proud of it. You’ll see them all in the Nov issue of the Can Forum.4 Louis D has his two books out; L Cohen is bringing out his volume shortly.5 I met A.D. Hope at Scott’s a few days ago. All is well, here.

Love to you & Mary,
Irv

1"For Irving Layton, with love & best wishes, from Desmond Pacey, September 1, 1958."


4See 172.1.

5See 123.7 and 5.

Dear Desmond,

I spent all of yesterday with your book and ended up by giving an informal lecture on it to a group of very interested listeners. This was at a hut four of us along with our wives and friends have taken for the winter. I plan to have a very full outdoor life, and ought to smash a couple of bones learning to cross-country ski. The place isn’t a "hut" at all, but a large double-storied six-room affair, with comfortable beds, divans, deep armchairs; heated by oil with a French-Canadian stove thrown in for colour and smoke. I shall be spending most of my weekends there. All of us, excepting my niece,1 who is a dermatologist, are teachers who love argument and good liquor. The women are easy on the eyes and lively; one of them has an international reputation as a mountain-climber.2 She’s also an excellent skier, and I count on her to keep some of my brittle bones intact.

175. #2, 3360 Ridgewood Ave
Montreal, Que
September 16, 1958
Your stories are fine, fine. I like a writer who is honest, one who’s not afraid to strip himself bare. The adult world of evil seen through the eyes of innocence. You render the shock of recognition well. With pathos, though no whining, no self-pity. I like the class-consciousness in "The Trespasser", though there’s more in the story than that: the insincerity, gentility, repressed snobbishness of Mrs. Cooper, and the feeling the boy has that in some indefinable way he had betrayed his mother. "The Picnic" is an excellent story, so are "The Boat", "The Mirror", "The Field of Oats", and "Aunt Polly" with its rendering of the boy’s impressions before and after the death and its very human conclusion. "The Lost Girl" falls into place. Fine, fine.

I think the more obtuse of your critics will sneer at the childlike transparency and the uncomplicated linear development of your stories, but I know you won’t pay much attention to their yowlings. The KDs can’t hurt you--those stories have a vision, integrity, simplicity. Of course, those who read the smart chatter in The New Yorker or Esquire won’t cotton to these stories, but then, sophistication brings its own punishment. I’m one who believes with Goethe that the true artist is naive. KD’s review of Ten Canadian Poets, by being so downright silly, can only do you good. Why in the name of all that’s holy does he get such books to review? He knows fuck—all about poetry; though that limitation apart, he’s agreeable enough though not half so witty as his Anglo-Irish origins allow him to think he is. He impresses me as an amiable fellow who has been ruined by reading a biography of Oscar Wilde or Bernard Shaw.

I never did get to see the TLS review of your book. Have a copy you can send me? Most certainly I’d like to give that ducal snotrag a piece of my temper. But the Kay dee’s are everywhere, with their rust-coloured clammy bellyhairs.

Last Saturday I met an old Cambridge schoolfellow of yours—Al Piloto. He told me [he] had stepped into Patrick Anderson’s teaching job in Singapore, after Patrick had departed under the usual cloud of disapproval, leaving behind him a sizeable midden of rumours. He also told me that A’s Snake-Wine is largely a phantasy and fabrication, any correspondence with the truth being strictly accidental. Now I shall read the book, fiction by Patrick being infinitely preferable to autobiography.

No, no, I’m not writing any more poetry. Not for awhile anyhow—stories are what I want to do. Get a book of them out by next autumn. But go on with your fucking, for I shall be doing plenty of that too. My little one has a white ass worth a brick factory...The title for my Collected: A Red Carpet for the Sun.

All my love to you & Mary,
Irving
1 Annette (Flint) Goodwin (b. 1922), physician and first wife of Layton's nephew Bill Goodwin (see 288.3).

2 Elizabeth ("Betsy") Scarlet, Canadian skier and mountain-climber.

3 "The Trespasser" is the eleventh (89-96) of the sixteen stories in The Picnic; "The Picnic" (1-9) is first, followed by "The Boat" (10-19), "The Mirror" (26-32), "The Field of Oats" (97-106), and "Aunt Polly" (107-116); the final story is "The Lost Girl" (134-43).

4 Kildare Dobbs.

5 Layton is probably thinking of Goethe's famous conversation with Schiller of July 20, 1794, which inspired the latter to write On the Naive and Sentimental in Literature (1795), in which he states that genius, in its essence, is naive; as Goethe recalls their conversation, he sketched a symbolic plant to demonstrate a point:

   when I finished he shook his head and said: That is no experience, that is an idea. I was taken aback, somewhat vexed: for the issue which separated us was illustrated by this in the most striking way...but I pulled myself together and replied: I should be very pleased to have ideas without knowing it and even see them with my own eyes.


6 A. E. ("Al") Piloto (b. 1919), Associate Professor of English at the University of British Columbia (1955-83), he received an M. Litt. from Cambridge in 1956.


175.

249 Winslow St
Fredericton
September 18, 1958

Dear Irving,

Thank you very much indeed for your most encouraging letter of September 16. I had been feeling rather depressed for the last few days—the work has been piling up in connection with the opening of term—and your letter was as good as a tonic.

It is so good to know that someone of your calibre appreciates my stories, and that you see so clearly what I was trying to do in them. As you say, some of the smart-alecks will undoubtedly jeer, but to hell with them. Attacks do bother me, but always I am sustained by my belief that real honesty will ultimately triumph. It is so much easier, & immediately more rewarding, to fake sophistication, to imitate, to follow fads—but in the long run the only kind of artist who counts is the one who insists on putting down clearly & honestly his own vision. I don't say that honesty guarantees greatness, & I certainly am not vain enough to think my stories great—but I do say that without honesty there is no chance of greatness. You know I think it would be better for me if I were more vain—or at any rate had more self-confidence. I admire & envy your conviction of your own greatness. I agree with you
that to be great you have to think great. But I haven’t got it: I’m a sitting duck for the Darekill Dobbs. But your letter has helped enormously, & I thank you for the generous heart that prompted it.

In fact I’m encouraged enough to send you the first draft of a story I wrote yesterday. Will you read it over & tell me where you’d prune & clip it? I think it has honesty too—but perhaps not enough form. There are dull patches I feel—so be quite frank in your comments.

Your ‘hut’ sounds lovely. I’d love to tumble on those divans with some of your luscious ladies—if I weren’t happily married! (God, I’m respectable!)

I do hope you get your own book of stories assembled for next fall. What’s the news on A Laughter? Any reviews yet? I haven’t seen any, but I suppose it’s still a bit early.

I like the new title for your Collected Poems very much—much better than any of the others suggested.

Mary is busy putting the finishing touches to various paintings before sending them off to various exhibitions. She’s certainly got a nice group to exhibit this year.

Does your vital energy ever ebb? You always seem to be so full of life, enthusiasm, vigour. I ebb & flow. A week ago I was brimming with joie de vivre, but now I feel an ebbing tide and everything is an effort—is if I were swimming against that undertow at Cavendish. But I shall soon be all right again, & I’m not complaining—I’m just curious to know whether you too have these feelings & just don’t talk about them in your letters.

All the best,
Des Pacey.

enclosure: ms


177.[pc] September 23, 1958
Dear Desmond,

This card just to let you know your story arrived. Thanks for letting me see it, and thanks for the very heartwarming letter. I haven’t had a chance to read your story until this morning (The Day of Atonement) and I’ve made some comments as I went along. Over the week-end I shall get them into some sort of order and put them into a letter.

My lectures at Sir GW have started. Last night I met my class in The Appreciation of Poetry, and this evening I shall be meeting the one in Creative Writing. Maybe if I push the boulders away I shall find one or two poets wriggling under the desks. Leonard Cohen has a good book coming out—-if he can furnish the money for its publication. Had a fine letter from George Walton. His book is called The Wayward Queen.

Love to you & Mary,
Irv
Dear Desmond,

My classes at Sir George Williams started last week; one of them, for the first time since my association with the place, in Creative Writing. I'm handling only the poetic froth, the *furor poeticus*\(^1\); my colleague, a Mrs Wasserman,\(^2\) takes a similar course in prose. I can truthfully say I did everything eloquence and conviction can do to discourage the applicants from continuing with my course. There are eight or nine novitiates bumbling on the brink of misery and disillusionment, only one of them a female and she respectably married. Of the others two or three are disturbed adolescents, one is a Greek lost in the soft inconsequential words of Mallarmé, one has aspirations to get into the National Film Board, and one (I like him best of all) has the candour and truthfulness in him to say that he has never written a line of poetry in his life. Would the others were equally as truthful!

I've had a chance to go over your story with some care. There are good things in it, but there are several things that bother me. One of the them is the bare literalness with which you tell the story (neither the characters nor the events have that "aura", that other-dimensional symbolism that the best of your stories in *Picnic* possess), and the other is the lack of any real motivation behind the successive quarrels. Presumably these are caused by something other than the usual mother and daughter-in-law antagonism. But what is it? I'm left guessing. And unless you can come up with something really fancy, since the relationship is a fairly trite one, your story must inevitably battle against the charge of commonplaceness. What I'm trying to say is that you've set yourself an especially difficult task since you must write freshly about a situation that is one of the stalest in human annals. It's like me trying to write a poem about stars or snowdrops.

Moreover, your characters are fairly stock ones, doing and saying the expected things of them. Wife quarrels with mother-in-law; husband sides gallantly with his wife; etc, etc. So the old lady does have a temper and misses out on the better things of life, such as dandling her baby grandson and being helpful to her son's wife—but is there, really, much more of a story in all this? I don't think so.
But I may have missed the right turning; if you do work on the story, I’d watch the beginning of it where you give the reader the impression Elizabeth is a young wench (bra, panties) and I’d eliminate some of the expressions such as "Good old Bill"—an unlikely thought for the time. After all he hasn’t won his first Boy Scout Badge. Having said all this, I still have the feeling there are sexual undertones that my ear has been too thick to catch, or that you haven’t too skillfully presented.

Let me get this off to you. I’ll write again during the week.

Love to you & Mary,
Irving

1Latin: poetic frenzy.
2Rachel Wasserman (1909-93), Professor of English at Sir George Williams (later, Concordia) University 1947-80.

October 2, 1958
Dear Irving,

Thanks for returning the story & for your remarks about it. What you say will be very helpful when I come to revise it. A good deal of what you say is true—it is a stock situation, & therefore needs to be treated subtly. Some of my subtleties you missed—eg the reference to the 'bra & panties' & the mother-in-law's remark that her husband still likes to make love to her are meant to suggest that she is desperately eager to be sexually attractive, & that the basic component in her antagonism to the daughter-in-law is her feeling that the younger woman is attractive & that she really isn't. The whole point—and I think it is a fairly fresh one, if I can only get it across—is that Elizabeth's conscious desire to be 'good' is always frustrated by her unconscious desire to be 'bad'. Well—it's not very original I guess, but there's nothing new under the sun.

I believe Fred is going to ask you to review my book of stories for the Fiddlehead.¹ I hope that you'll do it, & if you do, be perfectly honest. I do feel that you could do the best review the book will get: by which I don't mean the most favourable, but the most searching. Attack the faults as much as you wish, but I feel that you are one of the few potential reviewers who will see that the stories are not quite as simple as they look. For example, one person wrote me to complain of my snobbery in "The Trespasser"—when, as you rightly noted, the whole point of the story is that the polite facade of upper middle class gentility is a fraud & a delusion.

I was much amused by your account of your creative writing class. I have a very keen group this year—sixteen—all of whom are primarily interested in writing short stories. There are two or three who also write poetry, but I don't profess to be able to help them much there.
We are beginning to get quite a flow of short stories for the Fiddlehead--the McConnells in BC, Hugh Garner, some unknowns--but we haven't had one yet that I feel is quite good enough to be our first story. Have you a good one to submit? Or do you know of any young Montrealers who do?

Mary has had a painting selected for the travelling exhibition of the Maritime Art Association for the third successive year. She has also sent off a couple of entries to the Academy & is getting two ready for the Canadian Soc of Painters in Water-Colour. The better of the latter two is a terrifically subtle & delicate study of a clump of sedge--if they don't take it they're crazy. The other is an abstract, but I personally don't care for abstracts.

Write again when you have time. It's always good to hear from you. By the way, that feeling of ebbing energies I complained of turned out to be incipient flu--shortly after writing my last letter to you I developed a temperature & had a day in bed.

As ever,
Des P


William C. McConnell (b. 1917), short story writer and lawyer, member of Vancouver's "Bath House Group" of the 1930s, legal adviser to Malcolm Lowry and founder of Klanak Press; his wife Alice (Parsons) McConnell (1917-1982), who published stories in such journals as Adelphi and Queen's Quarterly in the 1940s and 1950s.

Hugh Garner (1913-79), Toronto novelist, short story writer, essayist and journalist, author of Cabbagetown (1950), and Violation of the Virgins and Other Stories (1971).

Dear Desmond,

But why do you say I missed the sexual antagonism between Elizabeth and her daughter-in-law? My last sentence said that I thought your story had sexual overtones and to what else cd I be alluding but this? However, as in your "Silo" stories, your symbols are either extraneous or insufficient: a better word wd be abstract, that is, they're not made into a living part of the story, woven into its tissue. Here you rely upon inessentials (bra, panties) which, considering the age & demeanour of the character, wears a slight air of the ridiculous, and you're inconsistent for you tell your readers that her husband still liked making love to her, a thought which fills her with satisfaction. Why, then, should she have this mysterious anatagonism towards her son's wife? Nowhere else, moreover, do you suggest that sexual jealousy is the cause for Elizabeth's quarrelsome ness. Right?

I've written Fred telling him I'll be glad to review The Picnic. Love to you & Mary.

Irv
181.

October 9, 1958

Dear Irving,

You're certainly an argumentative bugger! Your latest card received, and I'm amazed by your thick-headedness. Surely to say that "There may be sexual overtones which I have missed" (as you did) is not to say that you were aware all along of the sexual antagonism I spoke of? Moreover, doesn't the very fact that you did not see this sexual antagonism sticking out like a sore thumb (or an erect cock!) but only felt it as "overtones" negate your charge that my symbols are extraneous? I meant it to come out as "overtones" because after all the story is written from the woman's point of view, is in fact her stream of consciousness, & she is not conscious of her real motives. She thinks that all she suffers from is a bad temper.

So you think she wouldn't wear a bra & panties? Now just ask yourself how old the woman is. Her son is having his first child. Now our eldest son (Mary's & mine) is 17, & our neighbour's son is 19 and already has a baby--in other words, the woman might be Mary two or three years from now. Now do you think Mary is going to stop wearing a bra & panties in two or three years' time just because she will then be in her forties?

And what is so inconsistent about her saying that her husband still likes to make love to her? It's not inconsistent, but consistent, one of the clues. The woman says that her husband still makes love to her, tells herself that, seeks to reassure herself. This woman is 45 and is afraid that her days of desirousness are about over; her son's wife is about 20 & on the threshold only of her days of maximum desirability; hence the unconscious antagonism.

I'm glad to hear that you'll review The Picnic. I enclose a copy of the Brunswickan with the student reaction to the book.¹ Put it in your Pacey scrapbook.

It's good to have a friend to whom one can write so frankly. Keep the notes coming!

Love,

Des


182.

3360 Ridgewood Ave,
Montreal Que
October 18, 1958

Dear Desmond,

The big news is the birth of a son to Louis D and his wife, Stephanie.¹ The child knocked somewhat precipitously asking to be let out of the warm fluids of his mother some six weeks early; now he's here, and his name is Gregory, and he's adored by everyone as if he were the Messiah child.
himself. Betty has seen him—he says he’s a fine philosophic fusion between his parents, a nice balance of their most attractive features. I’m waiting for him to be in his cradle before I visit him: let him have some strength in his infant composition before he sees this harsh fact in the world he’s let himself into. In the weeks Stephanie was feverishly gestating and cell-metoting, Louis got himself a house, bought furniture for it, hammered and sawed and painted, in general did all he could to smooth down the wisps of straw with his amatory breast. He’s been too busy and I imagine too excited, clucking and crowing over his red-faced youngster, to see anyone. For all that I think he’ll survive, probably write an article on "Paternity and Poetry"—or The Concept of Fatherhood in English Poetry from Milton to Masefield."

This has been a year for strange dramatic overtures in the lives of the poets. Louis’ sudden plunge into the dizzying abysses and delights of domesticity, acquiring a wife, a child, and a home, after many years of semi-bachelorhood; my own adventure you already know—it might be said I moved in the opposite direction to Louis, except the real truth is I doubled my responsibilities, not halved them! Now Leonard Cohen has decided to bemuse all our wits by entering the family business—the making of suits for unpoetic characters across the land to buy and wear.² Our great lyricist is now a shipping-clerk, penning odes to wrapping-paper and string. A handsome way of living brought him to this pass, debt. He puts a good face on the whole affair and mutters something through his strong clenched teeth. If you put your ear close enough you’ll make out the words "discipline", "good for my character" and many other such edifying sounds. May the gods, kind to the erratic ways of poets, be merciful to the three of us.

For all your blustering and name-calling—who do you think you are, Layton?—you haven’t convinced me. Because I’ve read your other stories and I’m NOT altogether an idiot, I sensed the sex antagonism between your two characters, however, naming the bra and panties of Elizabeth and suggesting in an interior monologue that she was well-liked by her husband are insufficient clues to which the reader can attach all sorts of meanings, even ones inconsistent with your story, or nothing at all. My mother who is 85 also wears female underdress, though she’s long found a bra unnecessary; nevertheless, if I wished to give a portrait of her I wouldn’t select stockings or make mention of her fancy garter—she has one—but select those details only that wd suggest her age and circumstance in life. True enough, you’ve selected details with a purpose in mind; my criticism, however, is that the details are isolated, mechanical, and unconvincing. Hell, why should the two squaws leap at each other’s throats because Elizabeth wears panties and a bra? Sounds like an illogical proposition baldly put? Of course it does, but you’ve put the thing hardly less baldly than that. You’ve no right to expect
your readers to do all the "symbolizing" for you, find rich treasures of psychology, etc under a surface you've merely indicated with a sweep of your pen. You're like a person who shouts out "Fire!" in a crowded movie-house then compliments himself on the powerful effect a single word of his can have!

Whatever remains of me after teaching and lecturing has been picked up for three forthcoming panel discussions, one of them under the auspices of the United Nations Association in Montreal. This wk I speak on the lighter side of poetry to a group of teachers. Reading some frivolous and bawdy poetry for the occasion I composed several of my own on the late Pope Pius XII:

As naked they lay in bed
Sister Angelica said:
"Imagine, if they could see us
What your cardinals would say, sweet Pius".

All my love to you & Mary,
Irv

1Gregory Dudek was born on 15 October 1958.
2Cohen was working at Freedman's, the family's clothing business in downtown Montreal.
3Panel discussion, United Nations Association, Montreal, 24 October 1958.
4Pope Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli) (1876-1958), died on October 9.

183. October 29, 1958

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of October 18. I was surprised and pleased by the news of Louis Dudek's son and heir. Whatever happened to precipitate this great change in his way of life? I understood that his wife lived in New York City and that they only saw one another at long intervals. Did they suddenly fall in love all over again, or what? Anyway, I hope that the change brings Louis much happiness. It certainly seems to have excited you—are you the godfather or something?

And Mr Cohen has also gone through a change of life! What will become of Montreal's bohemia now that all its leaders are becoming tame & respectable? Well, I suppose you are still flourishing in unorthodoxy & you are enough single-handed to uphold the heterodox banner!

Well, we'll forget the short story. We shall obviously never convince one another.

While I think of it, I'll tell you a little story I heard lately & of which I am very fond. Three clergymen were having a cozy chat and decided each to reveal their secret weaknesses. The first admitted that when things got really tough he forgot his temperance scruples and had a few stiff drinks. The second, after some urging, admitted to a taste for lechery and that on occasion he could not resist
the temptation to slide his hand up the silken thighs of the prettiest choir-girl. The third was silent, but obviously restless. Finally, he gave in to the pleas of his fellow ministers to confess his secret vice. "Well," he said, "I'll have to admit that I have a weakness for gossip--and that I can hardly wait to get out of here!"

I enjoyed your little joke at the expense of his late Holiness.

Not much news to report from this end. I was pleased to see the review of your Laughter in the Montreal Star last Saturday.¹ Have there been other reviews? I haven't seen any. Nor have I seen any recent reviews of The Picnic--in fact none at all except the local ones. I hope to hell a few reviews get printed before Christmas, so that a few copies will be sold as presents. I'm counting on a few royalties from that book to help pay off the mortgage.

I'm bogged down with the preparation & delivery of lectures, the marking of essays, & such like routine chores. Wish there was some prospect of a trip to Montreal or somewhere--am getting rather dull.

Sorry not to sparkle more in this--but it's been raining steadily for 3 days & my fuse is water-soaked.

Love,

Des

¹C.G.M., "New Volume of Verse by Local Poet," rev. of A Laughter in the Mind, Montreal Star

184.[pc] Wednesday [October 29, 1958pm]

Dear Desmond,

The last issue of the Fid in this morning--and your amusing remark that "Layton, Dudek, Souster and Reaney have passed their meridian".¹ You seem to be in one big hurry to bury us: how silly and malevolent can critics get? Actually, Dudek's Laughing Stalks is his best book so far, a classic as sure as Sunshine Sketches,² and Reaney's second book,³ for humour, verbal dexterity, and imagination is in a class quite by itself. Souster has never climbed towards a meridian, his latest poems being as good or as bad as his first. His recent bk, Crepe-Hanger's Carnival⁴, has all the virtues and faults of his other books. As for Layton, your sentence will stare back at you in all its stark and uncapturable asininity when you see the recent poems in the Nov issue of the Can Forum,⁵ three of which mark new departures in feeling and thinking, and one, "My Flesh Comfortless", perhaps the greatest lyric written this century.

Fondly,

Irv

¹Layton refers to Pacey's comments:
Taken together, these three books seem to me an accurate representation of the present state of Canadian poetry. Although the wave that began to gather force has
not yet quite subsided, a new wave is forming. The best work of Smith, Scott, Klein and Birney is almost certainly over; even such younger poets as Layton, Dudek, Souster and Reaney have probably reached and passed their meridians; but fortunately there are poets such as these three, together with Jay Macpherson, Daryl Hine, and Leonard Cohen, already appearing above the horizon. The future seems assured.\textsuperscript{(46)}


\textsuperscript{3}James Reaney, \textit{A Suit of Nettles} (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958).

\textsuperscript{4}Raymond Souster, \textit{Crepe-Hanger's Carnival} (Toronto: Contact, 1958).

\textsuperscript{5}See 172.1.

185. \textsuperscript{\textcopyright} October 31, 1958

Dear Irving,

Got your card. So I made you mad by saying you fellows had passed your "meridian"? I suppose now you will rewrite your review of \textit{The Picnic} & let me have it with both barrels!

Apparently my remark had the effect I wanted it to have. After all, you have been telling me you were giving up poetry--so why blame me for saying you have probably passed your meridian? If you haven't, no-one will be more pleased than I.

I agree with you about Souster. I enjoyed his \textit{Crepe Hanger} very much--he has a small gift but a real one, & he brings off the minor miracles with remarkable consistency. I haven't yet seen Louis D's new book. I disagree with you about Reaney--there are some good passages in it but a lot of pretentious nonsense too. He obviously doesn't have a clue about Leavis--& yet pretends to satirize him!\textsuperscript{1} Balls!

Cool off, hothead!

As ever,

Des P

\textsuperscript{1}Pacey refers to Reaney's preface to his book:

These institutions sometimes nourish the educational theory and the literary criticism condemned in July and August, and the mental attitude described in May..

Scutumus stands for \textit{Scrutiny}, the famous critical quarterly edited by Dr F.R. Leavis which ceased to be published some years ago.

James Reaney, "To the Reader," \textit{A Suit of Nettles} vii-viii.

186.\textsuperscript{[pc]} \textsuperscript{\textcopyright} 3360 Ridgewood Ave, Montreal, Que [November 1, 1958pm]

Dear Desmond,

As a critic, God knows you're well-intentioned and alert, but you have a penchant for obiter dicta\textsuperscript{1} seemingly
pulled out of thin air and resting on no other support but that which your breath can give it. You choose, moreover, a slight occasion such as a review of some insignificant bks of verse for the moment to deliver yourself of your weightiest pronouncements, so that the latter seem to hang more precariously than ever on nothing except your say-so. You did the same thing awhile ago when you reviewed an anthology of Australian verse and made the unqualified assertion that Australian verse left the Canadians way behind. Christ, man, why do you say such nonsense, proving you don’t know a good poem from a hole in the ground? The Aussie poem you did select for Cndn emulation was such a slight, imitative affair it shd have been apparent to you at a first reading...I like ragging you, and my disagreements never affect my judgements.

Love,
Irv

1Latin: an incidental remark or unofficial opinion.

2Layton refers to a Pacey review in The Fiddlehead:
I do not think that we in Canada could muster a group of poets equal in quantity and quality to such recent Australians as Kenneth Slesor, John Thompson, AD Hope... There is, for example, the paucity of overt influences here: one is not continually being brought up short by echoes of Eliot, Auden or Thomas as one would be in a similar anthology of Canadian poetry. (38-9)


3I wish I had space to quote many of them, but I must content myself with quoting the poem which in my opinion is the pride of the book—‘Love Me and Never Leave Me’ by Ronald McCuaig" (39).

187.[pc] Tuesday [November 4, 1958pm]
Dear Desmond,
Don’t forget to listen to Anthology next Tuesday at 8:30pm— it may be earlier in your part of the world. I shall be on with five poems from A Laughter in the Mind. There’s a good chance Folkways may be bringing out a long-playing record with me in the lone and stellar role of reading my own poems, about twenty of them. I’ll know definitely next week. Love to you and Mary.

Irv


2Folkways did not release a recording of Layton alone, although he had previously appeared on the Six Montreal Poets--1957 Folkways recording with Scott, Smith, Klein, Dudek and Cohen.
November 5, 1958

Dear Irving,

Thanks for the two postcards, which have just come in. I was about to write you anyway, to say how much I admire the poems in the current Forum. "My Flesh Comfortless" is especially good, and perhaps the best thing you have written. That frog comes through magnificently, and the opposed visions of terror and joy are beautifully adumbrated. Splendid!

I also very much appreciated your review of my book. You have certainly written of it far more sensitively than anyone else has or is likely to. (Incidentally, a few newspaper reviews from Ottawa, Montreal, etc. have now come in, & they are all favourable but vague and superficial.) I think you have brought out very clearly both the strengths and the weaknesses of the stories, and I hope that your final paragraph is a true estimate of their worth.

As for the business of dropping obiter dicta in reviews, isn’t that most of the fun of the game? Reviews tend to be pretty dull, and surely it is good for the soul of both writer and reader to throw in the odd bombshell of unsupported but provocative generalization?

I’ve just had a row with a brash new young lecturer in the department, so I’m not in the mood for a long chatty letter. I lost my temper!

As ever,
Des P

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Thursday [November 6, 1958pm]

Dear Desmond,

Your letter just in with the morning’s mail. I’m glad you like the new poems in the Can Forum: your enthusiasm for "My Flesh Comfortless" will give this day an especial glory. About your stories—all I can tell you is that the more I read them the more I find in them and the more I like them. I hope this news will not displease you. I may even be wrong in the adverse criticism I made of "The Lost Girl"—give me time. About your reviews—you’re quite right, and I’m in the wrong. Your "obiter dicta" do liven things up, make the complacent reader sit up and take notice. But as I said, I like ragging you and anyway what’s a friend if not someone you can speak one’s silly mind and heart to without caution.

Love,
Irv
Dear Desmond,

Except for my marital troubles, the news continues good. Regarding the first, Bet and I are getting a "separation" for the time being, a divorce to follow after we've gotten our first breath. Like the furniture we bought when we shackled up together, this too must be done on the installment plan. T’is a glorious life!

Jack McClelland says he's crazy enough to print 5,000 copies of the Collected: expects a big run on this book, and I'm not discouraging him. Folkways is interested in marketing simultaneously with the publication of the book an LP of Layton reading his own poems, and someone in Detroit wants me to do a tour of American colleges and univs with Harvard, Princeton on the circuit. Fantastic! Still, I'm not letting all this go to my silly head--I'm working on a longish short story which I ought to have licked in about two weeks. What does Fiddle-faddle pay for short stories--say one that wd run to something like 5,000 to 6,000 words? Sorry to sound so crass but having to keep two households going has put a slight squint into my innocent blue eyes.

I suppose you read Milton Wilson's article in Tamarack R. Apart from one or two places where he went off the deep end, I thought it very good. He writes well, sensitively. He's wrong, horribly wrong, of course, in supposing Dudek a potential narrative poet--the fellow couldn't tell a story with a tape recorder beside him to prompt him. He's a lyricist in search of a big theme; unluckily the "big theme" today can only be treated dramatically and D is much too straightforward & uncomplicated for that. I should also have liked Wilson to have said something more about Sutherland's defection from the struggle for modern poetry in this country--a defection which was motivated almost purely by self-disillusionment and egotism. I see a great myth beginning to form around his name, but to me who knows the inside truth, it's the most rib-tickling exploit of the decade. Finally, like yourself, Wilson makes the mistake of thinking I'm a romantic, because he confuses the sweeping gesture with the thing the gesture is pointing at. Or rather, he lets the first obscure the second...Rosenthal, in The Nation, is closer to the truth than either of you when he calls attention to my concern with sadism. His mistake is to dissolve the poems into biography.

Please excuse the narcissism of this letter and write soon. All my love to Mary.

All the best,
Irv

1 This plan was not realized because of Layton's continuing problems with the American Immigration authorities.

2 Layton may be referring to "Dislocation;" see 257.3.

4Wilson characterizes Dudek as a narrative poet in his *Tamarack Review* article:
Dudek has shown in lyric cycles like Twenty-Four Poems, Keewaydin Poems and Europe the desire to maintain his candid stare but to expand beyond the isolated lyric. His attempts to find a flexible, sustained verse rhythm from his study of Pound's metrics point in the same direction. His instinct may be right, but he may be trying the wrong genre. I have often toyed with the idea that he is really a narrative poet manqué--still waiting for the right story, like all good Romantic poets. (86)

5Layton refers to Wilson's remarks:
Layton can show delicacy and precision, even in this poem ["Seven O'Clock Lecture"]. But we are likely to notice other more striking qualities: the unhesitating grand gesture that sweeps over discordant mythologies; the direct self-assertion that drags the bleeding pageant of a broken heart, cracked like the Red Sea; the Romantic certainty that the poet has chosen a demanding and desperate and ultimately tragic vocation, that his poetry is the saving lie which defeats time and that mankind is made to be measured by the imagination; finally, the unexpected low-pitched conclusion, with its ironic, apocalyptic bell heralding the leap from laundered grief into real tragedy. (88-89)

6Rosenthal noted Layton's preoccupation with sadism:
Even in these passages, which breathe so vividly the speaker's desire to be what he says he is, we feel a certain malice for its own sake, an unworthy urge to assert power and give pain: in Layton's own phrase, "the passionate will to hurt." That will reveals itself throughout the book; perhaps it is what the poet's "Nietzscheanism" really amounts to. In "Cain" he tells us of shooting a frog, and of how he "couldn't help sneer" at the way it looked in death, and of how the sight built up in him an urge to kill "anything with the stir of life in it." Here, as in "Cat Dying in Autumn," there is a marriage of the morbid and the sentimental. The two moods, of course, go notoriously together in the superman-dream. Pieces like these two inevitably take their cues from Lawrence, but the Lawrentian trauma at the ruthlessness of things is somewhat different from Layton's self-intoxication with it.

As I have suggested, it is his struggle to bring a not—quite—related malice out into the open that makes this writer interesting. (215)


191.[pc] November 27, 1958

Dear Desmond,

Of course if by a "romantic" one means I'm closer to, say, Blake or Shelley, than I am to Dryden or Tennyson, then most surely I am one. Lately, however, I've been trying to re-think my whole position—a helluva thing for a poet to be trying to do, anyway!—and I'm almost persuaded to equate the "romantic" with the "immature". Perhaps it's a notion that goes along with aging bones and shortening of breath. I dunno. What I doono is that I want to write something different, something "deeper" than I have done up to now. Something that takes off from "My Flesh Comfortless" though
I hope in the transition I don’t lose my "gaiety" or "sensuousness". At the present I’m working on a book of short stories to be published by McClelland & Stewart next autumn... Wd I be bugging you too much to ask you to write the Secretary of the Canada Council in support of my application for a Senior Arts Fellowship? The letter must be in before Dec 1st.

Love,
Irv

Desmond Pacey, letter to the Canada Council, 30 Nov. 1958, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

192. December 1, 1958

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of Nov 25 and your card of Nov 27. I have written to the secretary of the Canada Council supporting your application for a Senior Arts Fellowship.

Your letter sounded most enthusiastic. 5000 copies of the Collected, lectures at Harvard & Princeton, a new short story, a review in the Nation—things seem to be going your way with a vengeance! Well, don’t let it go to your head, & remember that the ultimate reputation of almost any artist is in inverse proportion to his contemporary success. I don’t say that as a sour grapes comment, for I realize that you have had your share of neglect & hostility and that you have worked hard for your present place in the sun. The main thing is not to allow this adulation to encourage you to write too much too easily. Once you reach a degree of eminence, editors etc will accept anything you write—so you must provide yourself with high standards.

We should very much like to have your story in Fiddlehead, but unfortunately we do not pay for contributions. I’m tempted to say we will make an exception in your case, but I don’t think it would be fair. Will you let me see it anyway? I should like very much to read it.

A romantic surely is one who responds to life emotionally & intuitively rather than merely rationally, & who therefore oscillates between extremes of ecstasy & terror rather than maintaining a calm, moderate, balanced position. The fact that there is more thought and less sheer emotional exuberance in your recent poetry doesn’t really alter the fact that you are basically a romantic. If you develop a Popeian acceptance of the world as it is—whatever is, is right etc—you would cease to be Irving Layton. You can afford to develop intellectually because your emotional responses are so keen, but I can’t see you ever becoming a classicist any more than Yeats became one. After all, you admire Yeats, Lawrence, Blake—& what are they if not romantics? There’s much more to be said on this question, & we can pursue it if you wish.
I have written a new short story in my head but have not yet committed it to paper. It will be my own attack on unqualified romanticism. A romantic woman tourist & her husband stay at a small fishing village; they see a young fisherman whose interesting face & manner convince the woman that he is "different" & exciting; then they see some good paintings in a nearby lighthouse & discover that they are the work of the young fisherman; the woman is all for "adopting" the lad, taking him back to the city for art lessons etc etc; the lad balks, & finally the woman goes to the local priest & urges him to persuade the youth to leave the village; the priest opposes the plan on two grounds: (1) the 20th C world is not friendly to the arts, & it is only her romanticism that leads her to think that this lad would win quick fame; (2) the lad is apt to do better work here in the village, not because (as she thinks) it is a romantic environment but because in the hard work of fishing & the release of painting what he knows the lad has found a life better than any he could find outside. The trick will be to get the ideas across without being abstractly didactic. Do you think I can do it?

Love,
Des P

1The Fiddlehead did not begin paying contributors until 1969.

2Pacey did not complete this story.
Layton refers to Frye's remarks:

The romantic tradition is now carried on by Raymond Souster and Louis Dudek. Irving Layton has been closely associated with this group, and much at least of his earlier poetry is indistinguishable from it. But beginning with *In the Midst of My Fever* (1954) he began to turn his enormously prolific talents in other directions. One aspect of him, represented by *The Long Pea-Shooter* (1954) and *The Blue Propeller* (1955), is the dramatizing of a poetic personality not unlike that favoured by the 'jam session' schools of New York City and California. The other aspect is consolidated in *The Improved Binoculars* (1956), a collection of his work which is perhaps the most important single volume of Canadian poetry since the Pratt collection of 1944.

It is difficult to do justice in a sentence or two to the variety and exuberance of Layton's best work. The sensuality which seems its most obvious characteristic is rather an intense awareness of physical and bodily reality, which imposes its own laws on the intellect even when the intellect is trying to snub and despise it. The mind continually feels betrayed by the body, and its resulting embarrassments are a rich source of ribald humour. Yet the body in the long run is closer to spirit than the intellect is. (89)

3 Irving Layton, "Foreword," *A Red Carpet for the Sun* np.

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**194.**

**[cc]**

mid-December, 1958

Dear Desmond & Mary,

From my semi-basement apt I can see the heads and torsos of the people who pass my window, and since their legs are not visible they seem to be pushed or pulled by an invisible force. I wonder frequently whether that's a good symbol for human existence—in fact, for all existence. Everything comes and goes; now it's here and then it's gone, swallowed up in the white blankness, the wind its sole epitaph. But friendship, love, poetry, these remain forever, and for the warmth and kindliness you have always shown me I am deeply grateful. May 1959 be memorable in your lives for the affection of many old and new friends.

With love and all good wishes,

Irving

249 Winslow St

Fredericton, NB

December 17, 1958

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**195.**

Dear Irving,

What has happened to you? It seems a very long time indeed since I have heard of you. Are you engaged in some masterwork, have you been captured by the FBI, or are you on a pilgrimage to Mao Tse Tung? I trust that you are not ill or offended or discouraged.

I got the first batch of reviews of *The Picnic* from Ryerson Press last Saturday—and a pleasant surprise. The reviews of this book are much more perceptive, intelligent & understanding than those of *Ten Canadian Poets*. Whereas almost all reviewers of the latter missed its significance completely—whether they praised or blamed it, it was always
for the wrong things--the reviewers of the Picnic seem to see clearly the strengths & weaknesses of my stories. On the whole they are amazingly kind, & since these favourable reviews are appearing just before Christmas I have hopes that the sales will enable me to reduce our beastly mortgage a bit.

I have had a rather worrying time over my mother during the last few weeks. She suddenly developed a breast cancer, & had to have an amputation on Nov 26. I didn’t know about it for almost a week afterwards, & so was unable to be with her. She is making a fair physical recovery now, but is feeling very despondent. I have been writing to her almost every day in an effort to comfort & reassure her.

I haven’t written that short story about the young fisherman-painter yet. I’ve been waiting to get your views on it. Does your long silence indicate disgust?

One of my students recently wrote a good essay on you under the title "Irving Layton--Poet or Pornographer?". Of course he concludes that you are a poet, & that your alleged pornography is honesty & vigour. The students certainly respond with enthusiasm to your poetry.

What is the news of the McClelland & Stewart collection? Is it scheduled for spring?

I trust that you & yours will have a gay & festive holiday.

Love,
Des P

1Mary Elizabeth (Hunt) (Pacey) Boulton (1895-1963).

Dear Desmond,

Lowercase eec was here, giving a reading at the Moyse Hall, McGill. Very disappointing, almost as bad as Stephen Spender who was a long jet of colorless urine. Poets, I have decided, should neither be seen nor heard. I’ve seen truckdrivers and even sodajerks with more vitality than these so-called celebrators of the free and virile life. Men with real native wit in them, not offering up the warmed-over wisecracks of thirty years ago. After his flat and uninspiring reading was over, I sat opposite Cummings at a party given in his honour but I didn’t exchange two words with him, for I thought if I did I’d come out the loser. Somehow, I don’t think a Polish or a Hungarian poet would have appeared as repressed, inert, and uncomfortable as he did, nor as I remember Auden and Spender did. English-speaking poets are basically frightened men, self-conscious to the point of paralysis. They make me sick. More and more, as I observe them, their poems strike me as being wish-fulfilling lies—that, or neurotic complaints of fundamentally weak and shattered personalities, unable to struggle successfully with their environment—the wet dreams
of an imposed—upon adolescent, too timid to go to a brothel and too fastidios or indolent to masturbate.

This letter and the enclosed poems give you my feeling and mood of the present moment. They’re not half so savage or bitter as I’d like to make them. I sent Louis’ poem on to him,2 with a letter pointing out the present risks he’s running and warning him against them. A poet is one who is naked—that’s the truest definition I have of him. When he begins to muffle himself with respectability, etc and scouts the frogpond where he belongs, he’s finished, washed up. I think this is happening to him now, the irony being that he foresaw the dangers years ago when he first took on the appointment at McGill. As I wrote him recently, he’d like to have the "calm Shakespearean brow" without the Shakespearean anguish—it can’t be done! The other poem is for Ron Everson.3 You can make what you like of it. Personally, I feel as if I’ve been "fucked". This is my way—the only way I know—of cleansing myself. Both poems are going to be in the next printing of A Laughter in the Mind, along with a neat preface.4

I’ve never felt happier or more vigorous. All my love to Mary—

Yours,

Irving

enclosure: ts "The Transparency", "For a Tailor’s Dummy" and letter to Ron Everson, December 28, 1958 [with ms note]:

Dear Desmond, While the extent of my "help" to Everson is substantially as I have here stated it to be, I do not wish this to become public knowledge or the subject of public gossip. You’re the only one besides Everson and myself who knows of the existence of this letter and I rely absolutely on your discretion. Though I did feel I had to straighten matters out, I don’t want to start an ugly literary scandal. The poems are here and that’s all that matters, or should matter. Irving.

1ee cummings, poetry reading, McGill University, 16 December 1958.


3Published as "The Transmogrification," (For F.H.) A Laughter in the Mind 68-69.

4The second edition of A Laughter in the Mind reprinted the "Foreword" from the first edition.

197. January 1, 1959

Dear Desmond,

Well, I take it all back. Everson is that rare person, a forbearing Christian gentleman. He’ll probably turn out to be the most remarkable person I have ever met. The morning he received my letter he phoned me. He went over the contents of my letter point by point, demurring here,
agreeing there, but it wasn’t what he said in his own
defence that removed my suspicions, it was the sincerity and
sweet reasonableness in his voice, and the genuine humility
of the man. Only someone utterly convinced of his own
rectitude, and the injustice of the accusations hurled at
him could have spoken so even-temperedly. The phone
conversation ended with mutual assurances of esteem and
goodwill, and an invitation from him to join a welcoming
party for Ralph Gustafson that he had arranged at the Press
Club. Louis D was to be there, Leonard Cohen and Frank
Scott. I wasn’t able to make it, though I had promised I
could, because I had been up the whole night and the night
before that on the composition of the letter and the poem,
and the sudden letting go of the tension was too much for
me, especially as I had helped myself generously to some
holiday cheer. I wasn’t intoxicated—just generously happy
at finding reality and appearance, for once, miraculously
fold into each other. No, that wasn’t it. I was happy
because someone had understood and accepted the violent
dialectics of my nature, my feeling that growth is by
opposition. If ever I had sorely tested anyone, it was
Everson; a smaller man would have flung back at me with
quite understandable human vindictiveness. Instead, he
behaved with magnanimity and Christian forbearance. I am
still awed by it.

Last evening I did see Gustafson and his four-months-
old wife. They were at Everson’s who had asked me to meet
them there. We had a pleasant time of it, though I couldn’t
stay very long. Ralph is as handsome and distinguished
looking as ever—his wife (her name is Betty) is somewhat
plain, but she has a very open and attractive smile. She
looks as if she had lots of patience and good sense. And
she’s certainly intelligent. I think they’ll be happy
together.

Together with the Eversons they went to see Chaplin in
The Great Dictator. I went to see my family, and then
drove Betty to the Compton’s where she had been invited for
a New Year’s Eve party. I left her at the door and returned
to my semi-basement apartment for a very quiet celebration
with Aviva. Have you read The American Woman? Excellent.
Also, The Tragic Philosopher, a study of Nietzsche. Very
good.

Love,
Irv

enclosure: ts revised "For a Tailor’s Dummy"

1Misdated 1958.

2A native of Lime Ridge, Quebec, Gustafson had been living in New York since 1939; recently
married, he honeymooned in the eastern townships and was currently making preparations for a year of
travel across Canada (see 251.1).

3Elizabeth (Betty) (Reminger) Gustafson, nurse, a native of New York City.
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your two letters, the two poems about Everson & Dudek, & the letters to & from Everson.

I quite agree with your analysis of Everson's letter to Smith. I wondered at your friendship with Everson, since I should have thought it would be obvious that a Public Relations man is really on the side of the devil. I believe that Everson is sincerely kind, & friendly to literature, but such people have loyalties to their bosses which ensure that their devotion to literature is only skindeep. Your letter to him is a masterpiece of exposition & expostulation, but is he worth it? My attitude to such people is to accept & return their friendship at the superficial level at which such a relationship is possible with them, but to avoid any deeper entanglement. Your passionate generosity has betrayed you into a situation in which you have been hurt, and I can understand your need to cry out. But having cried out, my advice is that you disengage quietly. You can't do yourself or anybody any good by beating the thick skulls of public relations counsels.

By the way, the sort of undercurrents suggested by Everson's letter to Lloyd Smith were among the factors that deterred me from accepting the Ryerson Press job.

I should like to write you a long letter, but I have piles of work to do & must get it done before leaving this Thursday for a weekend at Harvard--Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Committee again. Mary sends her love.

As ever, 
Des

1 Layton had asked a number of his Montreal friends, such as F.R. Scott and R.G. Everson, to write letters on his behalf to the American immigration officials (addressed to a Lloyd Smith); Layton saw a copy of Everson's letter, which referred to the assistance Everson had given Layton as a writer, rather than the reverse.

[s.s.c.]: revised "For a Tailor's Dummy"; revised again and retitled "The Transmogrification by a Lesser Michelangelo" (ms: Irving Layton. I think this wraps it up. The main trouble lay in the 2nd and 3rd stanzas. The construction was awful, and they didn't get the poem off the ground. The picture I have in mind is not really "The Transfiguration"--but the animation of Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.)
Dear Desmond,

I hope you aren’t snowed under [by] my flurry of letters, postcards, cards and unfinished versions of poetry! B—r, but the weather here is cold. I don’t remember a winter like this since my boyhood. This is one of those old-fashioned winters that used to strike terror into the hearts of the proletarians on St Elizabeth Street.¹

That’s very good news about the reception The Picnic is getting. I’d like to see some of the reviews to compare them with what I wrote. Do you know Dudek is writing a review of it for The Canadian Forum?² It ought to be an intelligent appraisal. Have you finished your short story? Mine got no attention from me during the entire Xmas, because of my fever with Ron, and the poem. I think the final version I sent you has got something. I’ll clear away all birth-traces and use it: a poem is a poem is a poem.

A Red Carpet For The Sun shd be out by late March or early April.

A Laughter in the Mind--2nd printing with 16 additional poems--will be out the end of this month.

I’m writing all the time and I’ve never been happier or looked better.

Yrs,

Ir

¹Kayton’s family lived on Saint Elizabeth street from their arrival in Montreal in 1913 until 1925.


Dear Desmond,

You’re as right as a Dutch uncle--I should never have allowed the relation with Everson to go as far as it did. But damn it all, I like poetry and every poor devil who has to write it is my brother. His stuff was no good, horrible to begin with, but it improved with time and appreciation. He kept on working at it--could I refuse to see him after the encouragement and criticism I had given him? As long as he worked at his poems, I felt it was my obligation to help him along as much as I could. I don’t regret that part of my association, not one bit, since there are a dozen or more poems that are quite good, though I do have some doubts and misgivings about the ethical niceties of the matter. But to hell with that, I’m beginning to sound like a moralistic philistine.

I’ve no intention whatever to raise a hue and cry--it would only call attention to the fact that my pants were down and my buttocks naked. The perplexity that I find myself in is what discomforts me. I can’t make up my mind about him--whether his humility and kindliness are genuine or merely the disguise of an exceedingly able public
relations counsel who has digested Dale Carnegie\(^1\) and can regurgitate him without the slightest facial twitch or contortion? I don’t want to do the fellow an injustice—I also don’t want to be taken in. There’s a quandary! Under the circumstances, I think the best thing I can do is follow your sage advice and "disengage".

The title for your story is magnificent! It would make a fine title, I’m thinking, for the whole Layton-Everson episode—Borscht and Bollocks.\(^2\) Sub specie aeternitas the whole thing is a borscht bubble...

My little one, Aviva, and I very likely shall be spliced this summer. The separation will be legally effective sometime this month, since I’m not contesting Betty’s right to custody of the children. The only thing the lawyers need to straighten out is whether I can have them during the summer for more than one week—which is all Bet will at the moment allow. But Bet has a lovely, warm human smile...

Aviva has landed a job teaching in a very old private school in Westmount.\(^3\) Her subjects are History and English Literature. She’s also doing some freelance work for the CBC. You may have heard her Xmas piece. I thought it was quite good. She’s truly my mate, I have much to be grateful for. Love to Mary.

Yours,
Irv


\(^1\)Dale Carnegie (1888–1955), American lecturer on effective speaking and human relations, author of the bestseller How to Win Friends and Influence People (1936).

\(^2\)Layton must be thinking of someone else’s story title: "Borscht and Bollocks."

\(^3\)The Weston School for Girls in Westmount, Montreal.


201.

January 14, 1959

Dear Desmond,

According to the Times Lit Supp, dated Dec 19, 1958, I am now a "father-figure" in Canadian poetry.\(^1\)

Hooray!

To mark this happy event with me, please accept and smoke at your own risk the enclosed cigar. Let Mary have a puff of it also.

As ever,
Irving Layton
1 "Finally, Irving Layton appears as the "father-figure" which Canadian poetry has lacked in the past...Poetry now seems as natural to Mr. Layton as the very things he writes about: it has become the expression of a whole man...."


January 15, 1959

Dear Irving,

A hurried note to thank you for your several letters & cards. Having been away at Harvard from last Thursday to this Monday, I got way behind in my work & am still not caught up. There are piles of essays to mark, letters of recommendation to write, lectures to prepare, committee meetings to attend, etc etc. But I must snatch a few moments to tell you a bit about my Harvard trip & to comment on your recent letters.

Your letter taking it all back about Everson crossed mine telling you you should never have trusted him. Well, if you will be such a windmill don’t be surprised if your friends get caught in the turn of the blades sometimes! Everson probably is a nice enough guy, but that doesn’t alter the facts that he wants to emasculate Ryerson Press & the CBC & that if the barricades ever did go up he’d be on the wrong side. I don’t really mean that in any literal sense of course but you just can’t be a Public Relations Counsel & not be a stooge of big business. But I do think you can be a professor, even at McGill—for in our system the universities are not part of the Establishment but the most significant part of the opposition—the more or less loyal opposition if you like, but still the opposition. That’s a big issue & we can debate it at length later if you wish.

Your review of The Picnic is in the current Fiddlehead, which is just out. It reads pretty well, apart from the first paragraph which seems to me a bit confused & ambiguous. I forgot where I put those other reviews, but if I can locate them in my files I’ll send them to you. I wonder what line Louis will take in the Forum?

By the way, I’ve been reading Louis’ two new books & like Laughing Stalks very much indeed. He’s much better at light satire than at meditative verse I think—I don’t care for most of En Mexico.

I’ve reviewed Miriam Waddington’s Season’s Lovers for Fiddlehead & have used the review to summarize her development thus far. She’s a minor figure, but she has some good points. Her chief fault is a desire to be fashionable & popular, her chief lack intellectual power & consistency, her chief strength a kind of honest naivete.

I’ve also reviewed Gustafson’s Anthology for the Forum, & have taken a few cracks at Smith along the way (also at Kildare Dobbs). It’s a lively review & the best thing of that kind I’ve done lately. I did it one night this week when I was so tired I could hardly see—and often one’s best
work emerges from such a situation—I suppose the subconscious takes over.

Yes, I have read The American Woman—and just lately too, quite by coincidence. Some of the generalizations are pretty shaky, but the whole thing is interesting. What bothers me most is the implication that these problems are peculiar to American woman—it’s just woman, surely? It’s a cinch English women are no happier or sexually fulfilled—most of them would faint at the sight of a real prick, & scream if they were really fucked.

I don’t know who sent you the note you refer to—certainly not I—I haven’t been in Montreal since last June.

And what title are you talking about? I haven’t thought of a title for my short story—so why do you say "the title of your story is magnificent"? If I thought of one & have forgotten, for God’s sake tell me—I can’t afford to waste my infrequent inspirations!

Hope things work out in your triangle. I’m sure Aviva is a lovely person—or you wouldn’t be so devoted to her. But of course I am very fond of Betty.

Mary says to tell you she loves to get your ‘love to Mary’ messages—keeps up her morale.

This letter has been written in 15 mins—so please excuse the scrawl.

Love & kisses,
Des

1Pacey is probably referring to Everson’s role as co-publisher of Canada’s monthly journal of opinion, the Printed Word.

2Louis Dudek had been at McGill since 1951.

3Pacey refers to a section from Layton’s review:
Stylistically the fifteen stories in this volume make me think of O’Flaherty or the later Tolstoi who read his pious tales to the bearded peasants on his estate. Their great charm lies in their genuine simplicity, in their possession of a benign commonsense I am almost tempted to call Canada’s chief article of literary export. Ever since Socrates boldly identified knowledge with virtue, Western man has mistaken a conventional morality for the possession of wisdom and insight. The English-speaking peoples seem particularly liable to this pleasant form of intellectual self-abuse. Imagination, intensity, a cold unflinching veraciousness that cuts through the miasmal fears and illusions of the teeming and steaming millions—how few have been the writers who possessed these qualities. True, Mr. Pacey has seen the devil, but he’s pint-sized and unheroic and walks the pleasant sleepy streets of Fredericton with a shambling gait; moreover—since the devil is always present when divines dispute—the notion overheard that he serves a useful purpose in the economy of the human psyche has made him somewhat sluggish and complacent. (41)


5Pacey is thinking of a passage from his Gustafson review:
Perhaps it is because we have grown accustomed to, and a little tired of, Smith's introduction that the Gustafson introduction seems more deft, more witty, less pretentious and less tendentious. Smith's introductions to the successive editions of his book have not been revised as thoroughly as they might and should have been; he begins to sound a bit like a gramophone, its needle stuck in the same old groove. Gustafson, in contrast, is fresh, provocative, challenging. His first paragraph, unlike most first paragraphs in treatments of Canadian literature, is affirmative, not apologetic. "Canadian poetry has had self-respect and integrity from the first", he says in the opening sentence, striking a fine bravura note that remains dominant to the end. At times, perhaps his enthusiasm runs away with him--"Heavysedge touches mastery," Sangster "is all innocence," the Group of the Sixties are "as distinguished poets as North America has produced," Pratt is "a master narrator, a technician of splendour and man of compassion and ironic depth," the Canadians of the forties and fifties "are writing as well as any of their contemporaries in England and the United States"--but since the enthusiasm is frank and unpretentious and expressed directly rather than in the jargon of the new criticism, we applaud and accept it. We ought to have the right now to say these things about ourselves occasionally, even though no one else is likely to say them and Mr. "Darekill" Dobbs is sure to sneer.


203. January 16, 1959

Dear Irving,

Congratulations on your paternity!

I was touched to get the cigar, & I smoked it last night & gave a puff to Mary as you suggested.

I looked up the TLS review--that's more like it! Obviously they've given up on the guy who reviewed my Ten CP & have a new reviewer who's kinder towards Canadian poets. I wonder if my letter (which they only printed in castrated form) influenced them--I certainly was able to show up his ignorance & bias.

Several people have commented on the Fiddlehead review you did on Picnic--saying what a good review it is. The students here are launching a new literary magazine, I made up largely of material from my Creative Writing course. I'll send you a copy when it comes out. Meanwhile I enclose the foreword I've just written for it. It's hard to know what to say in such things--if you feel I've struck any sour notes don't be afraid to say so.

Might use up this paper with an amusing anecdote. A few of the local artists have ganged up to have a life class every Monday evening in the University Art Centre. They cooperatively pay a model, & spend the evening drawing. The model is usually a male student. A week ago last Monday the model was a very virile specimen, whose bathing trunks (they haven't gone all the way to nudes yet) had a tremendous frontal bulge. One of the other prof's wives whispered to Mary "I wish he'd worn a jock strap--I can't concentrate." Whereupon Mary replied, "To me, it's just another curve to caress." The joke of this is that Pinsky always talks about Mary's excellent brush work, & how she seems to "caress the
forms". Anyhow, I was writing to Pinsky on another matter &
told him this--& his reply has just come in, saying that if
Mary is going to caress genitals he wouldn’t mind posing for
her himself. Any other offers?

Love,
Des

enclosure: "Foreword," Intervales

1Seven issues of Intervales appeared from 1959 to 1967, featuring the work of students and
faculty at the University of New Brunswick.

204.
Dear Desmond,
January 26, 1959

Thank you for your letters. I enjoyed both of them,
especially the anecdote about Mary’s live model and her new,
more pacific version of the Battle of the Bulge. I’ve been
working on a limerick and I’ve got everything except a
satisfactory last line. Perhaps you can supply one.

There was a woman named Mary
To whom balls were as sweet as a berry:
Men feared to divulge
Their genital bulge

Usable rhymes are hairy, fairy, wary, vary, chary.

Fiddlehead arrived two days ago. I think I must have
left out a sentence in the first paragraph of my review when
I was typing it, but I can’t now recall what it was. As it
stands, it does sound vague and even contradictory. ¹ A pity
you didn’t draw my attention to it before the printing. O
well—

I spent a good part of the weekend adding four more
stanzas to the poem I wrote for Louis D, "The Transparency",
and printing up several of the others. I had a lot of fun
doing it, though it’s questionable whether Louis will enjoy
the results as much as I do. He’s become terribly
pontifical and grim-faced—a regular party-liner who’d be a
lot happier with the shade of Zhdanov than with the
roistering wits in Canada. A fatal narrowness has begun to
set in, and the progress of this disease is as fascinating
to observe as it was in the case of John Sutherland. He’s
written an article for Culture—¹ I haven’t seen it, but
Leonard Cohen read me great chunks over the telephone—in
which he hasn’t a good word to say for any poet now writing
in this country excepting himself. My recent work he dubs
"well-nigh demented verse" and Cohen he calls "negative",
obscure and mythological. I can understand his thrust at me
(my success has gone to his head) but his description of
Leonard’s work is as stupid as it is false. Cohen is one of
the purest lyrical talents this country has ever produced.
He hates the mythologizing school of Macpherson, Reaney and
Daryl Hine. For Louis to identify him with it is a blundering, obtuse travesty.

So look for fireworks!

There was a party at Scott’s last Saturday—English Canadian and French-Canadian poets. Another try at "rapprochement". Frank talks about poetry as though he were addressing the Bar Association. Quite an enjoyable evening with everyone laughing at linguistic misunderstandings that seemed terribly witty.

I’ve got to dress for another party. Solidly, middle middle-class this time. Love to Mary from me and my bulge.

Affectionately,
Irving

1See 201.3: final sentence.

2Andrei Zhdanov (1896—1948), Soviet government official, close associate of Stalin, who severely tightened the ideological guidelines for postwar cultural activities.

3Dudek’s article in Culture stated:

But the newest generation of Canadian poets is not even capable of social anger, or of pity. Social protest has gone beyond these emotions and presents a blank face on all such real issues. The frame of the new poetry is tragedy: the tragedy of life itself, of humanity, suffering an incurable condition. This is the premise I read in the obscure cosmological imagery and the total negation of Leonard Cohen’s and Daryl Hine’s poetry at its best...

The tragic sense in these poets—paralleled by Layton’s recent well-nigh demented poetry....

Yet in these poets, an intellectual disorder (not only in politics, but in morality and religion) leads to a primitive mythological effort to organize chaos. This, when it is not only a game, proceeds from a state of mind fundamentally disturbed, and bordering on the deeply neurotic, or worse. Poets like Hine, Ellenbogen, Mandel, Cohen, and Purdy, grasp at a confusion of symbolic images, often a rag-bag of classical mythology, in the effort to organize a chaos too large for them to deal with in the light of reason.(412-14)


205.[pc]

Dear Desmond,

I don’t think I sd anything about your article tho’ you asked me to comment. Nothing anyone might quarrel with or take exception to. Anyone who has to write one of these things has my warmest sympathies—it’s so hard to avoid being pompous or patronizing. I think you skate on the thin ice beautifully, managing to sound encouraging with[out] seeming condescending, and enthusiastic without appearing to pat idiot heads. My sincere congrats!

Finished the poem on Ls D—fourteen quatrains. I now regard him as a worse enemy to modern poetry in Canada than
I once did JS (see his article in the last number of Culture). Also a more dangerous one, because he has the academic tools where Sutherland did not. Moreover, he was once a poet. People will say it's personal, but God knows I have no reason to quarrel with him—except in the cause of poetry.

Yrs,
Irv

206. January 28, 1959

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of January 26.

I had been wondering why you were taking so long to write—and you don't explain. Perhaps you merely were extra busy.

I have been busy with a variety of things. For one thing I filled out an elaborate series of questionnaires for Stephanie Dudek about the characteristics & merits of thirteen living writers, some Canadian and some American. You will be flattered to know that in the final ranking by merit, I put you first, ahead of Marianne Moore & William Carlos Williams! But I really do enjoy your poetry more than theirs, so I was simply being honest.

I have also written some poems myself, & collected some old ones, & put them together into the manuscript which I am sending off to Little Brown. They are, of course, children's poems, & they are being entered in a contest Little Brown is running for the best book for juveniles. Mary has done a cover design & some sample illustrations for the book.

I had read Louis' article in Culture, and agree with you that it leaves something to be desired. I can't understand his eagerness to get all these young poets pigeonholed when they are just starting to write. Anyway, I don't think Louis shines as a critic—his forte is for light satirical verse and for mordant observation of the contemporary social scene.

Mary & I very much enjoyed your limerick. I include my suggestion for a last line.\(^1\)

What about all the interesting questions I raised in my last letter? Do you not consider them worth debating?

The model in the life class this week was a very nubile female student who posed nude—gee, I wish I could draw!

As ever,
Des

\(^1\)Fugitive.
Dear Desmond,

Let me get this letter finished before Al Purdy comes knocking at my door. He’s back in Montreal—his second visit here in as many weeks. He’s looking for a job, and desperately hard up, I gather, just now. Litigation back home over his deceased mother’s will prevents him from living in sun-drenched idleness in Casablanca. The last time he was here, he fished for a job in Ron Everson’s outfit, but it all came to nothing after RE gave him ten bucks for a book review—an act of charity with no real conviction behind it. Now they’ll probably hate each other all their lives.

He’ll be here in about half an hour with two bottles of home-made wine. He keeps reminding me of Hart Crane—not the poetry, but the personality. Something similarly self-destructive in him, though not so violent. A madness muted and melancholy, an unconsolable loneliness. He wants a woman to love him tenderly, one who’ll smother him between her big breasts. The stars shine too coldly for one like him; ditto glitter the piles of snow.

Gee, thanks for putting my name over MM and WCW’s. I didn’t know you loved me that much. Stephanie Dudek is doing some research work for her doctoral thesis on writers. To me all that is stuff and nonsense, a fart in a tornado, not worth a sour pumperknickel. Even if she possessed more imagination and sensitivity than she does—she hasn’t a grain of either—I’d still say the same thing. For me she’s a goddamn butcher-bird, a castrating female bitch. She’s the well-equipped philistine, armed to the teeth with Freudian cliches ready to take on the whole world of creativity, and stupid enough not to know when she’s making a fool of herself. Trouble is, there are hundreds and thousands just like her, all eager to hide their sterility behind a page of graphs and diagrams. Louis left her with one ball still intact; now it’s all over with him, judging from the shrill falsetto that can be heard in his recent Culture article. I hadn’t read it when I wrote you; since then, I have and the joyless scribble has sickened me. It’s the John Sutherland syndrome, all over again. All the Cndn poets are no good because they’re not Catholics—so JS. All the poets...because they’re not socially conscious—so LD. They’re neurotic, they’re demoralized, inactive, guilt-ridden, etc, etc, ad nauseam—so party-liner Zdhanov-Dudek alias Major-General Luigi O’Dudek, still on the active list—all others being retired, demented or decadent. What a nauseating stew!

Even in the old days, which he now glorifies, when we were fighting for freedom of expression in First Statement, Luigi had to be pushed along and his courage kept to the sticking-point, otherwise there was no guessing when his bourgeois moralizing streak wd crumple him over and leave him an undistinguished mass of puritanical garbage on the sidewalk. No more than Sutherland did he have the divine
madness in him, the generosity and Dionysian frenzy of the true creator, but he made unease and timorousness, whipped up by vanity, do for both. All right, I'm a bit hard on him, but I'm not too far from the truth. This is a quarrel that was bound to erupt sooner or later—read, for enlightenment, his poem to me in The Transparent Sea, or mine to him, "Prescription" in Music On A Kazoo. I'm for the free uncommitted vision, for "irresponsibility"—this midget latter-day Archibald MacLeish is at least twenty years behind the times and an eternity too late. From now on he and his wife are the Macbeth and Lady Macbeth of Canadian letters to me, the assassins of the creative spirit. They'll find, however, there are precious few Duncans for their Rorschach-testing, petty-prudential, "healthy-minded", clean-jawed moralizing in this country. For myself, I intend to keep after them until they both drop dead.

It's the old, old story. The radical of yesterday taken up by the conservatives today: lecturer at McGill University, contributor to Culture, reviewer for McConnell's garbage-sheet. The joke is that Luigi doesn't know he's a bad, sad case of arrested development, that the area of discontent and vision has changed since he cut his literary teeth in First Statement. He'd have Cohen, Hine, Mandel write the way he does—or else! I myself am not overly-inspired by the work of the last two but for different reasons from Luigi's. I like to read Auden in the original, not have him translated for me into juvenile anxieties by Hine, and Mandel's poems show too much brainsweat. But Cohen is the purest lyrical talent this country has seen since Bliss Carman. But I love everyone who writes or tries to write a poem; it's the only brotherhood I acknowledge.

I'll take up some of the interesting questions you raised in your previous letter the next time I write you. Purdy's here, talking a blue streak to Aviva in the kitchen. I've got a tumbler of his wine in front of me, and it's astonishingly good. It's about time I joined them. But just let me say this. If ever you want to write an essay on my work, first read Nietzsche, especially his The Joyful Wisdom. I am a romantic, but with a difference...with scars. I know all about nihilism, skepticism, disgust, of the dark side of the sky farthest from the shining, fructifying sun.

All my love to Mary and happy ball-hunting.

Love,
Irv


2See 3.3.

3Louis Dudek, "For I.P.L." The Transparent Sea (Toronto: Contact, 1956) 104-05.
Dear Irving,

Thank you for your card of January 27 and your letter of February 1.

Your card puzzles me, since you talk about an article of mine. What article?1 I'm not aware of having written any article recently, & I can't imagine what you are referring to. Have you mixed me up with somebody else?

I hope you & Purdy had a good time over your two bottles of wine. He sounds like a lost soul. Mary, whose grandmother's maiden name was Purdy, thinks that she must be distantly related to him,2 & so is especially interested in him & his poetry.

The rest of your letter consists of ravings against Louis & Stephanie Dudek. I'm not going to be caught out again as I was over Everson--just as I had written to commiserate with you over Everson's perfidy, there arrived your letter assuring me that Everson was really a superb example of the Christian gentleman! I suppose if I were to write now & say "Yes, of course Dudek's a snake--& you should always have know that he was a snake", you would in the meantime have written to say that Louis Dudek is the greatest poet in the language.

But I am going to go out on a limb & say that I think your present fulminations against Louis are unworthy of you. I don't know just what Louis & Stephanie have done or said to you, but in so far as I do know the facts, I think you are exaggerating things grossly.

Surely you are a big enough person to see that Louis is jealous of all the adulation you have received lately (vide the review article on Ross's Arts in Canada by Hugo McPherson3 in the current winter issue of QQ4), especially as his recent books of verse have been either ignored or panned by the critics. It is this quite human & forgiveable jealousy that has led him to denigrate you in Culture. So what? So you should laugh it off--because it's really an indirect compliment to you. Surely you are not going to take seriously his groping around with groups of poets etc. in that Culture article? If you take it seriously, you will be unique. Such superficial surveys are useless anyway, and if Louis' ego demands that he publish such things why should

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2 Archibald McLeish (1892-1982), American poet whose volumes were attacked on political grounds during the 1930s; his narrow brand of patriotism was termed "unconscious fascist."
3 See 43.4.
4 Layton refers to The Montreal Star, founded by John McConnell.
we care? Perhaps McGill will give him a raise for "scholarly productivity"!

Of course your linking of the article with his having a job at McGill & reviewing for the Montreal Star is quite illogical. I feel that universities, even McGill, are anti-establishment, not their Boards of Governors of course, but their staffs & some of their students, & that to be on a faculty does not imply conservatism or even respectability. Your Canada Foundation Award might just as readily be taken to imply that you are now safe & respectable & castrated. As for his reviews in the Star, they are journalism of course, but done I presume for the money--& though I don’t approve of this way of operating I can’t see that it is a very heinous offence.

I’m sorry to see your creative energy being diverted into these literary squabbles which are so futile. Get on with the poetry and let your fellow poets get on with theirs.

Love,
Des

1Layton was referring to Pacey’s foreword to Intervales.

2Mary Carson’s father, H.L. Carson, was the son of Mary Elizabeth Purdy of the Purdys who emigrated from Ireland and settled around Orangeville; A.W. Purdy is descended from the same family.

3Hugo McPherson (b. 1921), critic, Professor of English at McGill 1970--; Chairman of the National Film Board (1967—70), author of Hawthorne as Myth-Maker (1969).


February 5, 1959
Dear Desmond,

Well-spoken, old mole! You’re right about everything except that this is a personal squabble requiring "bigness" to transcend it. At bottom, you can’t believe that anyone can take poetry this seriously, or that he ought to. My indignation doesn’t flow from Louis’ article in Culture, for you’ll recollect I sent you the first version of "The Transparency" weeks ago; moreover, the article does say some very kind things about me, enough certainly, if one’s amour propre were the thing at stake, to overlook the reference to my "well-nigh demented" verse. In any event, since when shd a poet be angered at someone calling him demented?

No, my good, warm-hearted, and sensible friend. At bottom, the disagreement between Louis and me is over our different conceptions of poetry and poets. As I tried to make clear to you, this is a disagreement that is rooted in the past, goes back to the earliest days in First Statement, has flared up and subsided during the years we have known each other. If you’ll read the poems I referred you to, you’ll see that this is so. Now you can say, with blithe
Canadian commonsense, that such matters are insignificant and the cosmos is undisturbed by them—and there's an end of it. Or you can look beneath the surface excitement, the "ravings" and ask yourself what the fuss is really all about.

I repeat: this is not a personal matter, and doesn't stem from anything Louis or Stephanie said or did to me.

My quarrel with Louis is a literary one; is the same sort of thing I had with John Sutherland. I reject his point of view as vehemently as I did John's and for the same reasons. If it were to prevail it would stifle creative activity in this country—and Louis intends to see that it prevails since it is to this purpose that he has outfitted himself with a press and has entered so lavishly into the reviewing field. If the critics won't break a lance with him, it's up to me to do so.

All I can say at this moment is—wait and see. I'm rarely mistaken in these matters. Of course what you say about his "jealousy" is true, but that is something that concerns him, not me. After all, I'm not jealous of him, so there's no reason for me to attack him: no personal reason, as I said before. But I am anxious to see that poets like Leonard Cohen and Daryl Hine get their desserts, and do not have to struggle against a literary smog, a climate of incomprehension, created by the labours of Dudek. But perhaps, as you say, I am grossly exaggerating the dangers.

My quarrel with Stephanie is of the same kind I have with all psychologists who step heavily into the field of literature. I detest the whole kaboodle. Here, again, this isn't something which has been triggered off by something recent. Read my "A Letter from a Straw Man", or more recently, "On the Jones Biography of Sigmund Freud". That Stephanie is somewhat more stupid and vindictive in her manner of going about her bail-cutting activities may rile me but that's not what makes me boil over. I frankly regard her kind as a real danger to poetic activity. Now, you may or may not agree with me. That is your affair, and I wouldn't presume to tell you what to think. But, equally, you must allow me my own opinion, and not simply jump to the easy conclusion that it must be something which she "said or did". When will Canadian critics begin to take literature seriously? Believe me, there are vital issues at stake here—just as there were in 1945. Only Louis is like the dull boy in the class who having at last mastered simple fractions can't understand why the teacher wants to move on to "complex fractions".

In any case—"literary squabbles"? There speaks the patrician voice of the critic. Tell it not in Gath, my friend, but poetry thrives on them.

The Everson story is a different matter. And is a lot funnier than you think. I had lunch with him several days ago—and he showed me another batch of new poems!

You're a good scout, and thanks for checking me.

Remember I write to you with complete freedom and trust.
You simply mustn't expect poets to be sensible. Love to Mary.

Hugs and kisses,

Irv

1See 204.3.


3---. "Jones on Sigmund Freud," A Laughter in the Mind 73.

41945 marked the founding of First Statement; see 3.3.

52 Samuel 1:20.

February 6, 1959

Dear Desmond,

When I go on as I do about Stephanie and Louis, it isn't because I dislike them personally; it's because they come to symbolize forces or trends which I abhor and oppose. Can I make you see that? It's simply my way of looking at matters—I think people are embodiments, crystallizations, moral and psychological recapitulations; they are more than mere flesh and blood. Perhaps it's a sinful and cockeyed way of looking at people and perhaps, for our times, it isn't. It's convenient, however; though its convenience may rest upon over-simplification. What, then, do I see in Stephanie and Louis? In Stephanie, the psychologizing attitude that wishes to reduce every poem to a fragment of autobiography, of case history. That regards poets as gifted, but crazy people. In short, she'd be much happier if they didn't exist, if they were sane and sensible and mediocre and troubled no one, especially themselves. I have heard her go on about the writing fraternity—you haven't. I also know what over the years she's done to Louis and what S. has had to fight off. If you want to see what I'm "fulminating" against read some of the Reichian psychologists, and the abominable Karen Horney. It's the drift, my friend, and it's part of a whole ethos which menaces literary creativity—and if you can't sense that you're either blind or unfeeling. Or you're just way behind in your reading.

Louis' "embodiment" is more complex. I know all the human factors behind the Culture article much better, I believe, than you do. I understand, and therefore oppose all the more strongly. There was always in him a moralistic, puritanical streak: no more than John Sutherland was he ever able to open up to literature as pure experience. He must always, alarmed or confused, send for the generalizing intellect to let him know how he ought to feel when confronted by the novel and the dionysian. All my conscious life I've fought this attitude towards art, towards poetry. That's why I broke with John Sutherland, and this is why, today, I am at odds with Dudek. I'll fight
anyone who exalts reason above imagination and intuition; anyone who refuses to see that the creative process is supra-rational. It's the fellow whose fires have gone out or who never had any who wishes to pretend that the moralizing and generalizing intellect is supreme. In our time, the creative fires are being banked down on all sides, with all the little people happily lending a hand: social workers, psychologists, university professors (not you, you write, damn you) and the thousands of good-natured, cultivated philistines who demonstrate again and again that while they may care for art they can also live without it.

Now do me a favour and sitting hard for a few minutes on that sensible Christian soul of yours, go back to Louis' article and read carefully the last four or five paragraphs. Observe their tenor, the phrases "total negation", "well-nigh demented", "dilettantism", "intellectual disorder", "a state of mind fundamentally disordered", "deeply neurotic", "irresponsibility", "perverse exhibitionism", etc, etc. I do not need to add. And all this about the most brilliant flowering of poetry that this country has seen! Now, do you see, my dear Sancho Panza, why I am so disturbed? The alliance of Stephanie's "psychologism" (surely you can see her influence in the above phrases) with Louis' moralistic, puritanical, anti-creative bias, plus a printing press and a pair of Macbeths eager to use it—and you've got the devil's own mischief. I, for one, shall not let them get away with it though you and others can howl your head off about "unseemly" literary squabbles. If I had really turned respectable, Desmond, I'd listen to you, but thank heaven I'm made of the stuff I am. A final tip—only sweet and sensible Canadians think anger always darkens counsel. Love to my Mary.

Hugs & Kisses,
Irv

1Wilhelm Reich (1897—1957), Austrian-American psychologist whose early work on psychoanalytic technique was overshadowed by his development of the pseudo-scientific "orgonomy" system.

2Karen Horney (Clementine Theodore Danielsen) (1885-1952), German-American psychiatrist, author of The Neurotic Personality of Our Time (1937) and Neurosis and Human Growth (1950).

3See 204.3.

4The idealistic knight's pragmatic companion in Miguel de Cervantes' novel, Don Quixote (1605).

211. February 6, 1959
Dear Desmond,

I talk to the younger poets all the time, and I think I know better than you do what Louis' attitude can mean to them. How it affects Al Purdy, or Cohen, or George Ellenbogen with whom I was speaking just an hour ago.
Louis presses his point of view, not only in articles and reviews, but also in his lectures. Perhaps that may explain why there are no poets at McGill this year...

But your letter depressed me. Are Cndn critics forever condemned to be blind and obtuse? Let me speak my piece. It is discouraging to realize that all you were able to see in the letter I sent you was a personal animus against Dudek, a "literary squabble". That's all that my anger meant to you, though you've read my poems, stories, and corresponded with me for these many years. And you're a professional critic. If you're that blind, what can I expect from others?

Do you see why I knock the universities? The battles for the human spirit are never fought on the college campuses!

Re-read the article John S wrote on modern Cndn poetry 8 or 9 yrs ago and compare it with Dudek's in Culture. There's matter here for a good article of your own. Behind both of them, I repeat, the motive is the same; similar, also, is the basically anti-creative urge.

Though professors talk about poetry being "the foremost point of human consciousness", etc, etc, they don't really understand what the phrase means and don't quite believe it when they do. Mainly, they use it to overawe the innocent, green student.

You apparently think that if anyone is against the Establishment he's okay with God and the angels. What a nice, sensible, and really decent point of view. It almost sends a religious shiver down my back. The password among all disembowelled intellectuals--"we're against the Establishment." Louis is against the Est, so are you, so is Frank Scott. So is everybody and his brother. What a naive Canadian you are! Try saying: "I'm against the Establishment" to Sartre or Camus. Do you see what I mean? No, you don't!

Hugs,
Irv

PS It's tough, Desmond, to be a poet. I don't know which hits me hardest--L's defection or your failure to sniff out essentials. Everybody talks about poetry, writes about it in learned journals, but how many really know what it's all about? Even you, alas, confuse poetry with respectability and keeping one's nose clean. It's a bitter life.

1George Ellenbogen (b. 1934), Montreal-born poet who has taught at Bentley College near Boston since 1965; author of Winds of Unreason (Contact, 1957) and Along the Road from Eden(1989).

2See 5.59.
Dear Desmond,

I am enclosing an item which appeared in Friday’s Montreal Star. Do me one more favour and re-read the postcards & letters (if you’ve kept them) I wrote you at the time of the Suez Crisis. Your reaction at the time was—"what does it matter? I’m a pacifist." And F.R. Scott played the part of the wise and humane liberal, the intelligent constitutional lawyer with uplifted reproving finger. What a noble attitude! As if History ever gave two discreet farts for noble attitudes and the "uplifted fingers" of the righteously clean-shaven who have lost the will to fight for their Welt-anschauung.

Did the Russians fight to keep Hungary? Did I say they would?

We of the West are too poisoned by doubt, cowardice and selfishness: we have no faith to fight for: our intellectuals are decent enough, but weaklings. In the perspective of time, the Suez Affair will be seen for what it was—the herald of the West’s doom, invested with all the tragic grandeur of historical symbolism. It showed decisively that we were played out, that the hour of our doom had struck.

For something like fifteen years I’ve argued the question of the Soviet Union with Frank Scott and other "decent liberals". But that noble man—true-blue Anglo-Saxon—could see only one thing at a time: Russia was a dictatorship! What a clear-sighted irrefutable observation! What sagacity! What depth!

Now read a poem I wrote in 1944 and that appeared in Here and Now—"Restaurant de Luxe". Or "Karl Marx" in Now Is The Place. Or read my "Cold War—Saxon vs Slav" in Music on a Kazoo.

"These are the firelands and this a sealed train
Of cold excursionists, throats buttoned up
With yellow timetables.
"Words without Music"—Here & Now

(Lenin was sent by Germany to Russia in a "sealed train" in 1917.)

"Who competent...erect...drill...fumble
The meanings of historical death,"
"Petawawa"—Here & Now

I’ve just read Hugo McPherson’s review in the QQ. He speaks of my "intuitions working powerfully". You, however, have made me wonder whether these academic gentlemen really understand what they’re saying or believe their own words. When the chips are down, you and the others go one way, the poet another. So it has always been, so it must be till the end of time.
After John S published his article on modern Canadian poetry, writing it off as finished, I wrote the following in my "Preface" to Cerberus:

"Some editorial jackass—the name is superfluous—started a rumour flying that the poetic ferment which had begun with so much promise in the middle forties had petered out scandalously before the end of the decade. After that, several other Missouri canaries lumbered forward to announce the same heart-breaking discovery. How touching it was to see them shaking their well-proportioned asinine heads and to hear their woebegone cries."

This was written in 1952. How did I know that the 1950's wd be the most brilliant decade in Canadian poetry? Intuition. You were one who shook his "well-proportioned asinine head" and uttered "woebegone cries."

My quarrel with Dudek is of the same order, but much more significant. Involved in it are the fundamental values of creativity itself.

At bottom, my friend, you do not really believe in poetry. And you cannot believe, because you cannot know.

Love to Mary.

Hugs & Kisses,

Irv


1Letters 50-53.

2German: world-view, philosophy.

3Irving Layton, "Restaurant Deluxe," Here and Now np.

4Layton, "Karl Marx," Now is the Place 29.


6Layton, "Words without Music," First Statement 2.10 (Dec.-Jan. 1944-45: 22-23); published as "Excursion to Ottawa," in Now is the Place 44.

7Layton, "Petawawa," Here and Now np.

8Layton is paraphrasing McPherson's review: Of all our recent poets, Irving Layton is perhaps the most impressive, because his grip on sensory reality is virile, while his intuition works powerfully to bring this fundamental experience into relation with man's imaginative understanding of reality. (679)

Hugo McPherson (see 208.4.)

February 8, 1959

Dear Desmond,

My exuberance perhaps made me say many things to you I had no right to say. "Fighting Words". Do overlook them. Everything can be put into one sentence. I don’t know which hurts me more: Louis’ defection, or your failure to understand its significance. Did you read Gayn’s article on Soviet writing in the QQ? That’s the image that always haunts my brain. Zhdanov-Dudek wd be the first to accommodate himself.

To be a poet is to see things with a terrible clarity when everybody else is blind or asleep.

All my love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,
Irv

1Mark Gayn (1909-1981), Canadian journalist, radio and television commentator, contributing editor, Newsweek (1941-43), Time (1943-44); author of Japan Diary (1946) and American Agent (1947).


February 9, 1959

Dear Irving,

Four letters from you in one mail this morning! Obviously you feel that if you can’t convince me by the logic of your arguments you can at least overwhelm me with their weight!

Well, it was fun to get them & to read them. You seem to have kept your temper with me so far, though there are a few sentences in which you get rather insulting. I’m obtuse and ignorant and patronizing and timid and so on. Good! All those charges are quite true—although they are also quite false. By which I mean that at certain moments I am obtuse etc—and at other moments I’m not.

I haven’t time to answer all your charges now, as I have a creative writing class all afternoon & must prepare for it. I’ll just jot down a few thoughts...

You say I don’t take poetry seriously. Well, perhaps I don’t—not as seriously as you. With the world teetering on the verge of self-destruction, I can’t take anything too seriously—I believe one has to cultivate a kind of spriightly gaiety (remember our Yeatsian motto—"bitter & gay, that is the heroic mood"—you’re getting too bitter). Perhaps there is a kind of desperate gaiety, a hectic almost hysterical gaiety, about my present attitude. I’m pretty well reduced to taking each day at a time & saying if I can have a drink & a good fuck & one joke, then the day hasn’t been completely wasted. You see I have to cultivate all this, because my bent is to weep & wail over life and I’ve got to fight my own earnestness all the time.

But that’s not really the point I was going to make. In saying that I don’t take poetry seriously enough you’re
misinterpreting my letter, the import of which was rather not to take criticism too seriously. My God, man, you’ve built Dudek up into a terrifying monster armed with Gabriel’s sword¹ and Caxton’s only press² to boot! What critic killed John Keats?³ Is Dudek really a threat to Can poetry? How? What is the real influence of Delta? What is the real influence of the Star? And who’s going to take Stephanie’s experiments seriously?

Of course critics will push their predilections: Frye will hunt for archetypes & Dudek for social relevance & Ross for Christian symbolism. So what? They each express their opinions, the poets either don’t read them or if they do, weigh their opinions, & either accept or reject them freely. That’s where I’d differ with you about Russia. If Louis were the president of the Soviet Writers’ Committee he would be dangerous—& off would go Layton’s head for deviations. But our society for all its faults is in some measure, & especially in literary matters (perhaps because we don’t take them seriously enough), still a free society.

Didn’t I say keep out of these literary squabbles & write your poetry? Now who’s taking poetry seriously? But of course if you enjoy them, go ahead & have fun. If you’re having fun, fine! But if you’re eating your heart out about such minutiae forget them!

Love & kisses,
Des Pacey

¹The archangel Gabriel, God’s messenger, is often depicted with a trumpet or sceptre; the archangel Michael is traditionally depicted with a sword.

²William Caxton (c1422-91), English printer who produced The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye (Bruges, c1473), the first book printed in English, and The Dictes and Sayenges of the Phylosophers (1477), the first book printed in England.

³Pacey alludes to the myth that hostile criticism led to Keats’ death, rather than the tuberculosis which decimated his family; this myth was inspired by Brown and Severn’s addition to Keats’ self-penned epitaph (see 17.3)—"This grave contains all that was mortal of a young English poet who on his death-bed, in the bitterness of his heart, at the malicious power of his enemies, desired these words to be engraven on his tombstone..."—as well as Shelley’s depiction of him as the neglected genius in "Adonais."

February 10, 1959
Dear Irving,

A fifth letter from you in yesterday afternoon’s mail! I took it down with the morning’s four for Mary to read, so I haven’t it here at the college for detailed comment.

I do remember your saying that you were ‘hurt’ by my failure to understand. Well, for goodness’ sake don’t be hurt where no wound was inflicted or even intended. My main motive was to kid you out of what seemed on the face of it to be an ugly and uncreative mood. As I said yesterday, if you’re really enjoying all this, or rather if you feel that
it is the creative expression of strong & justifiable feeling, by all means carry on.

I wish you would discuss some of these big questions & forget about Louis for a while. What about Russia? I’d like to know what you really think. Of course Adlai is right about their sense of purpose & our lack of it etc—but isn’t Gayn also right about their enforced conformity for intellectuals, etc? I’ve always been a great admirer of Russia. This Sunday evening we saw the Russian film Othello, & I thought it was magnificent. In terms of their Tsarist background etc, they’re doing marvellously well. But should we, with our tradition of freedom of speech, etc imitate them? If so, to what extent?

Also, the question of universities. You’re very sarcastic about my saying we’re against the Establishment & you make wild generalizations about no creative thought ever having come off the campus. Here are a few contemporary creative thinkers who have been university men: Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Albert Einstein, E.J. Pratt, A.R.M. Lower, (I know I’m going down the scale—but I’m just indicating the same sort of thing happens in Canada), Frank Scott, etc etc. If the universities went, what would be left to support the free play of the mind? What other institution is there?

Love & Kisses
Des P

P.S. Mary has heard Aviva twice on radio—re the boy genius & salesmanship—and enjoyed both talks very much. DP

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3A.R.M. Lower (1889—1988), historian, Professor of History at Queen’s University, author of Colony to Nation (1946).

4I have been unable to locate any record of these broadcasts.

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216. February 16, 1959
Dear Desmond,

Well, you’ve managed to turn the tables on me rather neatly, making me look like a humourless, temperamental prima donna to boot. Now it’s I, says affably composed above-the-battle you, who take criticism too seriously: Louis’ article? Forget it! Get on with the job of writing poetry. Minutiae—and you rub your navel complacently, for it’s such a nice feeling to know that one is above minutiae.

I’m beginning to think I’d better shut up, that the more one tries to explain oneself the more one is misunderstood. The plight of a whole civilization is
involved in this: the pundits call it "the failure of communication". I'd put it more drastically--literature is finished. Literature is a complex activity, but people are impatient with complexity, they do not want it, they do not need it, it will not make the machines run. For the artist, there is nothing to choose between America and Russia. Both are utilitarian societies whose god is efficiency--in both the rebel, the iconoclast, the mystic, the poet-prophet has no place. But my vision goes farther than these two, to include the whole world which I see daily growing more regulated in the interests of production and consumption in which the social worker and psychologist along with the commissar and bureaucrat compose the elite, assisted by the writer whose natural cowardice and sycophancy will enable him to play his destined role of morale-builder.

When I say that Louis' defection hurts me, as does your inability to see its significance, it's in the context of the above passage that I wish you to understand my words. It does not mean that I am personally "hurt", it's the poet in me that's wounded, for the hurt is in the prophetic soul, not in the feelings. For a poet is not a clever man, or an erudite man (though, of course, he may also be those) but one who knows what the essential things in his age are, what is dying and what is coming to life, what approaches on cat feet from afar. When he loses that intuition, he ceases to be a poet, though he may continue to write graceful verses and new Quartets. I've never said the universities do not have creative thinkers--I said, the battles of the human spirit are never fought on the college campus. Surely I do not have to invoke history to prove so elementary a point. If anything, the college and university gentry have always opposed the new spirit whenever it made its appearance and ended up by surrendering to it fifty years later when it was too busy combating some later manifestation of sensibility. They opposed Marx, ridiculed Freud, sneered at Shaw & Wells, were disgusted with T.S. Eliot, etc etc. Nietzsche still can't get a hearing at the universities. No, my friend, you and I are speaking about two entirely different things. The job of the universities is to clarify and conserve. You must not expect a Lawrence, or a Faulkner, a Camus or a Sartre to come out of them. (For God's sake, don't please write back to say each of these gentlemen has got a BA or its equivalent!). Creative writing, that is, creative feeling and thinking, cannot be done in the constrictive atmosphere of a university, since the intellectual, moral and psychological tensions that make up the Age can only be felt out there in the world, felt in their full intensity, I mean--felt emotionally; and not behind the ivy-clad walls that shut these out. Because you, Dudek, Scott, Smith all live in this artificial mould which insulates you from the real shocks and tremors of the contemporary world you have all acquired the same easy stance of amused superiority and condescension. There's nothing really to get excited about--it's all triviality, minutiae, and aren't we just too
clever to see this when chaps like Layton are running about like chickens with their heads chopped off. You, in fact, are the kindest—you offer to kid me out of my "uncreative mood"—but, of course, if I’m having fun, it’s all right with you. What can I say to you? Or to anyone? It all seems hopeless. More especially, because I know you are all intelligent people with well-trained minds, an excellent stock of ready information and amusing anecdotes, with your carefully checked hearts in the right place—that is, a little left of centre. But like Mark Gayn explaining the letter of apology of the Russian poetess (I forget her name)¹ to Kruschev—he thinks she’s making a humiliating surrender when actually she’s covering him and his likes with withering contempt: re-read the letter carefully—you are no longer capable of responding emotionally and imaginatively to the complexities and tensions of the age you’re discussing. It is for this reason I am disturbed by Louis’ criticism of the younger poets and your failure to see this as part of a larger social embolism that threatens to paralyze in time all creativity in the arts. The Russians can put on a fine production of Othello—but can they give the world something new? For me, the West means endless exploration, conflict, novelty. When we failed to fight for these during the Suez affair, I knew we were doomed. History is on the side of the great regulated herds of the future.  
All my love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,  
Irv

PS "And 0 you black ugly beast 0 my beauty  
Churn up these white fields of leprosy"
"Karl Marx"--Now Is the Place

These lines were written when I was supposed to be a Marxist poet, pure and simple. But you can see how these lines express my ambivalent, complex attitude to the event of the future, the triumph of the proletariat.

¹Margarite Aliger; "In June 1957, Miss Aliger offered her first letter of recantation. It was rejected, and the following month, in the third of his meetings with the writers, Kruschev attacked her by name." Gayn, 562.

February 18, 1959
Dear Desmond,
I’ve just finished two more cups of tea, it’s three
do'clock in the afternoon, and I’m at my writing table willing to put my clumsy hand at whatever late-winter poetic flies may alight. All I can see above the trench of snow in front of my window is the dark sloping shoulder of the apartment roof across the street. The sky falls like an immense—and because useless, silly—backdrop behind it, un-birded and grey.
So what’s all the fuss about? I’m trying to persuade you how inhumanly wise, intuitive, and noble I am? How altogether disinterested and altruistic, my heartbeat that of History’s itself--and you’re not buying it? I didn’t think you would. No one could be that virtuous—not even I!

Inside him, a Jew combines fanaticism and irony, passion and doubt. Both are equally real. It is what gives him his dramatic flair, sensitizes him to the illusions of his age, makes him a dissolvent. Moses putting his trembling hands on the hallowed tablets, and then breaking them—there is the symbol for my people. Believe me, I do not lack the gifts of self-scrutiny and self-satire. Dubious gifts! Art is self-awareness. The trick is to be self-aware without losing force and motion.

And now listen to something Yeats says in a letter to Ethel Manie: "I find my peace by pitting my whole nature against something and the greater the tension the greater my self-knowledge." And Blake speaks somewhere of the "severe contentions of friendship." So again, what’s all the fuss about? Very simply and very farmer-bluntly put, it’s that I feel that all the old concerns are dead—the aestheticisms of Eliot, Yeats, Gide, Proust equally with those of the anti-Establishment antics of the left-winging social realists of a decade and two ago. Irrelevant, that’s the word. Irrelevant, irrelevant, irrelevant. As usual the professors are caught napping, this time on the heavily-annotated tomes of Joyce and Eliot, unaware that humanity has turned a sharp corner into a world where pity and sensitivity, or even ordinary decency, have no address. Where the viciously perverse has become the normal, the tepid rebellions and "perversities" of Gide or Proust are ludicrous, the smile-making bravado of children. We need another kind of writer, someone who’ll touch the diseased heart of mankind, someone who will open our eyes to our bloodthirstiness,—no, that’s not it, that’s too strong, too active a word. Our condition is worse than that of the Romans—with no Christians in sight to redeem us. The "Beat" writers are saying it, but not very well or very successfully, and they’ll end up by destroying themselves rather than the conditions that produced them.

Forgive this sombre letter. I shall try to write more cheerfully in my next. All my love to Mary.

Many hugs, Irv

1 "And when he came nigh to the camp, he saw the calf and the dances; and being very angry, he threw the tablets out of his hand, and broke them at the foot of the mount." Exodus 32:19.

2 W.B. Yeats, letter to Dorothy Wellesley, 8 Oct. 1934, Letters 421.

Dear Irving,

Just a note to thank you for your two most recent letters. The latest one, which I got today, indicates that you are becoming more of your old mellow self and are realizing that you have been rather too self-righteous lately.

Last night I heard a lecture given here by Dr J. Tuzo Wilson, professor of Geophysics at Toronto, on the results of the International Geophysical Year. What he had to say of the international co-operation of scientists in this project, & of his personal observations of the work of universities in Russia & China, made me feel that there is still considerably more hope for the world than we imagine in our gloomier moments. I am not sure but what some of our sense of alienation stems from the fact that we are poets & humanists living in an age of science. The image we have of the coldly efficient scientist is a caricature: this man is warm & positive & humane, & quite immune to the shibboleths of John Foster Dulles et al. The world's irenicon may yet come through international science, which has at its disposal as much good will as we have, & far more of a sense of purpose.

Tomorrow I address the University Women's Club in Saint John on "The Present State of Canadian Letters". I intend to say some complimentary things about your poetry, & to herald Red Carpet for the Sun.

I've just had the bad news that Dorothy Livesay's husband has died in Vancouver, & she has had to fly back from England for the funeral. She'll probably feel guilty as hell at having left him for her Canada Council year abroad.

Our new magazine of student writing--Intervales--appeared on Wednesday, and the whole edition of 300 copies sold out at $1 each in three hours! I asked the editors to send you a complimentary copy. Did they? If not, I'll lend you my copy. Not that I think that there is any great writing in it, but it's a sign that the interest in writing is lively both on the part of students who write & those who only want to read. They could have sold three or four times as many copies if they had had the courage to have a larger printing made.

I got another batch of reviews of Picnic from Ryerson Press yesterday--all favourable except one, a nasty attack in the Vancouver Sun which said that Daniells' "foreword" was pretentious & spoiled any effect the stories might have had without it. Well, the idea of having a foreword at all was a bit pretentious--it was Lorne Pierce's idea--but it seemed to me that Daniells did the thing as modestly & tactfully as anybody could have done it. I quite agree with the reviewer however that such forewords are of questionable taste.

All the best, Love,
Des Pacey
Dear Desmond,

This morning I went down to the Folkways studio to record my voice and thirty-two poems for posterity.1 Exact at the halfway mark the microphone went dead, and neither my cursings nor my pleadings cd revive it. It almost seemed like a deliberate affront, as though the steel-plated contraption--it looks like a pinhead--had grown fed up with my voice and refused to listen to another single syllable. So the reading will have to be completed Tuesday night after my lecture at Sir GW2 if my lungs and larynx hold out. The LP is scheduled to appear at the same time as A Red Carpet For The Sun--April 29, 1959, or perhaps several weeks earlier. With the book supporting the recording and vice versa, sales and royalties may be quite interesting as they say in broken American.

Now I've got to get to work on the American reading tour. My first hurdle is the US Immigration that has me confused with Kruschev or Tim Buck3 despite everything I've said in letters, telegrams, and three separate hearings. I've now got a lawyer working on it, but he seems to be no more successful in clearing their delusions than I was. As a last desperate measure, I may see my MP and ask him to interest himself in this queer miscarriage of justice. I'm almost moved to send the Immigration officials a copy of The Ugly American4 with my sincere un-compliments.

Next week the 2nd printing of A Laughter in The Mind, with a Preface and 20 additional poems, will be out. The book should have been published before the first of January, but publishers are as unreliable as poets, moreso. However, it's a beautifully done job: paper, type, format, all very much comme il faut. It's history-making. This is the first time in the annals of this country that an English-speaking poet has been published by a French-Canadian. To mark the event the McGill Lit Society and Orphic Press5 are making a
"launching"—I shall read from the volume and the whole thing will be made palatable and profitable by generous quantities of sherry supplied by myself. The point is, there will be students from McGill and the University of Montreal so that, presumably, I can be booed in two languages. It should be quite an evening.

I’ve finished the short story I’ve been working on and I’ll send it to you in manuscript form next week for your comments. When you read it, you’ll see how related my recent angry letters were to the content of the story. Nietzsche let the cat out of the bag when he said: "Poets behave shamefully towards their experiences: they exploit them." Not only "good emotions" but "bad emotions" as well go into the making of a work of art. Since opposition, strife, conflict rules throughout the cosmos, it can not be otherwise. I wish I had more time for writing, but this year I’ve had no leisure at all. I teach two evenings each wk at Sir GW; one evening at the Jewish Public Library (a course in Eng Romanticism); and I have three private pupils, who, since they are taking, separately, courses in 19th and 20th century prose, keep me reading novels until the early hours of the morning. I don’t need to tell you how much preparation wd be required for a course in the 20th century Am & Brit poetry and a seminar on Yeats, these being the stint at Sir George Williams. All this, in addition to teaching matriculation History, Comp, and Literature at Herzliah High school. And, to all this, I must put aside two evenings and a Saturday afternoon for Cote St Luc family visits, plus a weekly visit to my mother at the Old People’s Home.

Luckily, I have a vigorous constitution, something I thank my mother for. And I’m happy now, much happier than I was one year ago when the break with Betty came which caused me more anguish than I could ever put down in prose or poetry. On three separate occasions, I tried to patch up the marriage, for the children’s sake as much as my own, but it couldn’t be done for the truth is Betty is much happier without me—something which neither I nor she was willing to face up to. Well, we’ve finally muddled through to sanity and good will, and in the process I think both of us have gained in strength and self-knowledge. Yesterday I went for a long tramp with Maxie. From now on I’m going to see him every Saturday and I’ve promised him a juicy, sizzling steak at the best steak house in the city after the afternoon’s exploration of the city. He’s both handsome and gifted, his compositions being very vivid pieces of writing. It wouldn’t surprise me if he turns out to be the great Canadian novelist this country has been waiting for. Anyway, just now, he’s great fun to be with. So is Sissyboo, my "gifted and temperamental daughter" who is growing into a most attractive young girl. When all is said, I have had some lucky breaks.

I’m glad Mary heard my "little one’s" broadcasts and liked them. There’s another "gifted" person--I’m just
surrounded with them! She's a resounding success as a teacher, besides having an educated ass. Her latest triumph is that Alexander Brott\(^7\) has undertaken to personally instruct her in the violin, her first lesson with him commencing this Thursday.

Many thanks for your boost of *A Red Carpet for The Sun*. You’re a good and generous friend. All my love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,

Irv

\(^1\)See 187.2.

\(^2\)Layton began lecturing part-time at Sir George Williams in 1952.

\(^3\)Tim Buck (1891—1973), a founding member of the Communist Party of Canada (1921) and leading architect of its trade union policy, held the post of general secretary 1929-61; author of articles, pamphlets and books.


\(^5\)The second edition of *A Laughter in the Mind* was published in 1959 by the francophone Orphic Press of Montreal.


\(^7\)Alexander Brott (b. 1915), conductor, composer, violinist and educator; founder of the McGill Chamber Orchestra, artistic director of the Kingston Symphony (1965-81) and guest conductor of most major Canadian orchestras.

February 26, 1959.

Dear Irving,

Delighted to get your much more cheerful letter of Feb 22. Apparently you are coming out of your black mood of the last few weeks, and that is good.

I hope you somehow manage to get the American visa. What is the basis of their exclusion of you? Did you once shake hands with Bim Tuck?

Congrats on the second printing of *Laughter*! Shall be looking forward to seeing the short story. How do you keep all those balls in the air? Isn’t your busy life cutting down on your sex life? Don’t let that happen!

My speech in Saint John last Saturday was a great success. The president told me that my name attracted the biggest crowd they had ever had at their luncheons—nearly a hundred university women at $3.00 a plate to hear me! They say there has been a great run on books by Canadians at the Saint John bookstores since the talk.

Last evening Lister Sinclair phoned & came round to the house—he said he could stay only half an hour, but actually he stayed from 9:30 to 12:15. He & Mary & I had a very good talk about books & writing. I had only met him briefly
before, & hadn’t particularly liked him, but we got along famously last night. One of the subjects we discussed was your poetry of which we are both admirers.

Love & kisses,
Des P

February 27, 1959

Dear Desmond,

I know that all the letters I send you--the wise, the prophetic, and those burning with a noble passion--don’t please you half so much as any poem I might write. So here’s this, which I hope you and Mary will like. I "finished" it this morning.

If Jack McClelland doesn’t have me in Toronto to help in the layout of ARCFTE I’ll work on my short story this weekend. I’m expecting his phone call any moment. He’s certainly going out of his way to be as obliging as he can, having previously consulted me on the selection of the type. His designer wanted to use "Joanna Cursive" (very prissy) but I sd nix on that!

I haven’t yet rec’d your Lampman literary wonder—wd very much like to.

To all the regular chores I mentioned in my last letter to you, throw in half a dozen lectures & panel discussions, and an equal number of readings. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irv

enclosure: ts "Because My Calling Is Such" (three versions)


2Irving Layton, “Because My Calling Is Such,” The Swinging Flesh 144.

March 4, 1959

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of Feb 27 & the three versions of the poem.

I’m afraid this poem baffles me. I can’t make out the syntax. I’ve read it about ten times, but I don’t get it. The sentences never seem to end. For instance, the ‘I’ in the first line of stanza two seems to me to be the object of reach—so why isn’t it ‘me’? And in the rest of stanza two, where is the main verb of which finger is the presumed subject? I gather that what you are saying in general is that your calling as a poet compels you to go into the dark to seek images, you are not contemptuous of the bright love which your girl keeps for you—but my God you’ve got yourself entangled in a complex maze of verbiage!

Well, I shall await the explosion—but I may as well be honest & not fob you off with some vague compliment which would mean nothing. I’m not silly enough to say that the
The poem is not good—all I say is that I did not find it a clear communication to me.

I hope you’ve had a chance to read Intervales. The editors would very much like to have a frank appraisal by you of its contents. They have had a number of generally complimentary letters, & of course they had my criticisms in the Creative Writing class, but what they would like is an objective appraisal by an outsider. So if you feel you can do this, & will send it to me, I’ll see that the students see it.

Life continues very busy—tomorrow David McCord1 of Harvard arrives for a visit, & on Monday Henry Ross2 of Princeton—and as I am primarily responsible for both of them, I shall be tied up pretty firmly.

Love & kisses,
Des P


2Henry Ross, Professor of English at Princeton University.

223. Thursday [March 5, 1959]
Dear Desmond,

What am I going to do with you? I love you like a brother—more!—but what can one do with a fellow who writes you about a poem that it’s "a complex maze of verbiage" when it’s the most direct and beautiful lyric you’ve ever written—one which the later Yeats would have been proud to have over his name, though it owes nothing to him? It’s exasperating but for the great love I bear you and Mary I shan’t explode. Just incidentally, and to bring a blush to your buttocks, with your letter arrived one from the editor1 of QQ who’s delighted with the poem and wishes to use it in the Spring issue.2

The "I" that bothers you in the 2nd stanza is in apposition to "blind Homer" (Swinburne, in the version of the poem I sent you). The "bright love" is Betty—my wife, you remember? And I am not saying, as you damned sentimentalist think I am, that I’m not contemptuous of her love "though my calling compels me to go into the dark" (what kind of corny trash have you been reading lately?): what I am saying is that a "mere woman’s love" can’t, or doesn’t penetrate the "lampless silence" in which all poets, from Homer to myself, unavoidably must live. I, furthermore, make the point sharper and more poignant by contrasting Homer (reflect now on the complexities of that word "lampless") who lived in more spacious and exuberant times for poetry than I do, who must crouch in the "rainless air", choking with the dust. This is not a fertile time for poetry. There follows the very moving image—I was moved when I wrote it, so I imagine it must move others—of my
being "bowed", in a crouched position, and therefore poised to kiss her hand and touch her face, if she wd but let me. But her face is "fabulous"—an ambiguity suggesting it is both beautiful and non-existent. In other words, she is not there to comfort me and to receive my grateful kisses for her understanding and love. For I’m a frog-prince, and it’s only the "frog" she’s aware of—repulsive in his foul cistern or ditch, where I gather my trove of images ie my poetry (bright phrase=phase) which becomes the coronal of my eclipse, ie my downfall and dismissal from her bed. I think I’ve said enough to indicate some of the ironies and complexities this poem has been woven out of, and will only add that I chose the word "lazar" in the final stanza because my original name before I finally changed it to Layton, was as you perhaps know, Lazarovitch.  

I should want to write a criticism of Intervales and intended to do so, but the CBC has given me MacLennan’s latest to read for an Inter-City Discussion of the book with Hugo McPherson in Toronto, and George Woodcock in Vancouver. Given my tight schedule, which I’ve now apprised you of, you can see what a downright calamity any blockbuster of a novel wd be. But if I have some "free" time next week I’ll most surely do it.

Love to my Mary.

Hugs & kisses,

Irv

1Glen Shortliffe, letter to Irving Layton, 3 Mar. 1959, Irving Layton Collection, Concordia University.


3Irving Lazarovitch adopted the pen name Irving Lazarre in 1928, changing his name to Irving Layton in 1937.


5Hugh MacLennan (1907-1990), novelist (Barometer Rising 1941, Each Man’s Son 1951), and essayist (Scotchman’s Return 1980).
pretend that he preferred poetry or anything else to a good fuck. Mere woman’s love, indeed!

The reason I misinterpreted the poem was that I just couldn’t bring myself to believe that you were really saying what you seemed to be saying. Don’t tell me you’re going to retreat from your honesty into this kind of fakery—that your goddamned poetry is so mysterious & important that for it you’d jettison the love of a woman? If that’s the price of poetry, it’s too damn dear!

And you can rant and rave as you like, and quote the editor of as many quarterlies as you like, but you still won’t convince me that this poem is up to your real level of achievement. Who’s young Mr Shortliffe to decide whether a poem is good? Don’t you admit that I’m the only critic in Canada that knows a good poem when he sees one? The rest of them are just sheep—because the great Frye has said you’re good, everything you write is ipso facto excellent. Balls!

Seriously, you’ll have to watch that from now on in. They’ll all bray in unison "Hail, the great Layton! Hail!" & you’ll have no way of knowing when you’re writing good verse or bad—except from your own not yet atrophied (I hope) artistic conscience & from me.

And why should a woman’s love reach across the darkness for the sake of poetry? She’s not reaching for poetry, but for a penis, & let’s face it.

And does the fact that the ‘I’ is in apposition with Homer help you? Of course not—Homer too is in the objective case, so it should still be ‘me’. And why do we have no main verb (but only participles) in the sentence beginning "Yet so bowed..."? It should be "touches".

The third stanza is not clear—the word order could be improved. The inversions are unnecessary & clumsy—and so they are in the fourth. And of course I hate the self-pity, & I abhor that identification with Christ. There’s certainly nothing Yeatsian about this last stanza—just see how often, when lapsing into this kind of self-pity, he lashes himself out of it!

I have been having some fun with you—but I am basically serious that this is not a good poem. I don’t like the theme—but I’m willing to concede you the right to say what you like. But I don’t concede you the right to indulge in needless inversion & plain bad syntax. As Johnson said, poetry must at least have the virtues of good prose!

Try not to explode, but consider my views calmly. And of course I too love you like a brother—if I didn’t I wouldn’t dare to talk this frankly with you.

Hugs,
Des P

1Pacey refers to Doctor Johnson’s assertion:

Every other power by which the understanding is enlightened, or the imagination enchanted, may be exercised in prose. But the poet has this peculiar superiority, that to all the powers which the perfection of every other composition can require,
he adds the faculty of joining musick with reason, and of acting at once upon the
senses and the passions.

(London, 1825) II: 404. (Rambler 86).

225. March 12, 1959

Dear Desmond,

Many thanks for your rip-snorting letter which arrived this morning and which I just finished reading. At last I struck the flint in your nature, and it's grand fun to see the sparks fly. Nonetheless, you're as wrong about this poem as it's possible for any one man to be--and I tell you this soberly, sanely, and calmly. This is one of the finest, one of the most moving lyrics written in the English language: I am proud of it, and shall be till my dying day. Believe me, I am a severe critic of my own work (the numerous revisions of this poem & of others should've convinced you of that) and I am equally indifferent to praise or to blame. A poem, any poem, must satisfy me. Not all do. I can run through the defects of my output of poems better and more tellingly than anyone in this land--it takes a great deal--you can never guess how much--for a poem to satisfy me. This poem is one of the very few that do.

You say it owes something to Yeats? What? "Foul ditch." But my line is "foul cistern or ditch". Not quite the same thing, and both nominatives chosen because cisterns and ditches are where frogs might be expected to be. I've looked through Yeats to see the reference to "blind Homer dancing", but have not been able to find it. I'd be grateful to you if you let me know where it lies in hiding. But I think you're the victim of your own mental telescoping: in one place he does speak of "blind Homer" (a literary cliche--no more Yeats' invention than my own) and elsewhere he speaks of various characters--beggars, etc, dancing. My reason for inventing a blind Homer dancing as I explained to you in my earlier letter was to express by means of this image the spaciousness and hospitality that Homer found for his poetry while I and poets of my era "lie crouched in the rainless air". The rainless air and the choking dust, of course, also have a more personal dimension, the inside of the convex objective mirror.

Did Yeats prefer a "good fuck" before everything else, including poetry? I very much doubt it. First, last, and always, he was a poet and you hardly do him justice by reducing him to this sentimental drivel. If you wish to see how ruthless WBY could be in the service of poetry, you've only to turn to the Jeffares biography of him and read over again the episode of Maude Gonne begging Yeats to shelter her for a night from the police who were after her--and being turned away by this "great lover". You're probably talking about the poems he wrote in his very old age when a dying man would give anything for one erection. Even so, that is much too crude a rendering of his last poems which
are full of suffering (I recall your saying in a review somewhere that you loved these poems of Yeats because they were so joyous—God, man, how can you be so blind?) and where sex is more than itself, is birth and creation, the antithesis of death.

Your trouble, Desmond—I say this affectionately—is that you're a sentimental philistine. I had to get this off my chest. Now I can get on, having removed the splinter in my brain. I wish you'd learn to read my poems carefully. Nowhere do I say that for the sake of poetry "I'd jettison the love of woman". That's not what the poem is about at all. Although it wouldn't be "fakery" if one did say just that—I recommend your re-reading Dubedat's great speech in *The Doctor's Dilemma*. A strong man doesn't ever give up anything for a piece of ass. It's you slobbering weaklings who find they must surrender their maleness in order to get it. And the great artist is first, last, and always a male!

"She (the woman) is not reaching for poetry, but for a penis..." A sentimental vulgarism. Let it pass.

My belief is that every poet is the resurrected Christ.

There's no "self-pity" in the poem; on the contrary there's the calm acceptance of the inevitable. I say as much, and so clearly that even you ought not to mistake both the tone and the intent:

> I shall not curse the bright phrase,
> Coronal of my eclipse.

Some final notes on the syntax. The "I" in the second stanza is in opposition, not apposition to Homer. A main verb is not required in the lines that follow for what I'm clearly saying is that since I am in a crouching position I am therefore (Yet) in a better position to kiss her palm while my fingers are touching her fabulous face. You're the only person who has seen this poem and found that stanza puzzling. You can draw only one conclusion from this fact, and you had better draw it. Of the six or seven persons who have seen this poem, you're the only one to complain of its obscurity, of its inversions, or bad syntax. You quote Johnson to me: I wonder what either he or you would make of Hopkins!

Read the poem over again; live with it for awhile. Stop projecting, put your habitual responses and prejudices into a deep freeze. This poem has caught you napping, because like so many critics you like the poet or the poem you can read yourself into, and when you find the poet has gone a distance ahead of you, your dismay turns into indignation. Let it not be said that with poems like "My Flesh Comfortless" and "Because My Calling Is Such", I left you panting and puzzled behind me. These poems are new, and better, a fusion of the passionate and the reflective, altogether a higher, finer sweep.

All my love to Mary.

Many hugs,

Irv
PS That you’re a sentimental philistine for whom poetry is a mere ornament or a set of fixed responses (in others of your tribe, the "ahs" before a sunset) is revealed in your refusal, firm and absolute, to consider the real experience behind this poem, and making it.

Poetry—that is, fresh experience, baffling, various and complex as life itself. Is that so difficult to grasp? Like others of your tribe you want to exclude everything that is real, everything that is unfamiliar and disturbing. You’ll even reduce so great and so ruthless a poet as Yeats to a pimply adolescent with a hard on.

enclosure: "Because My Calling Is Such" with extensive marginalia:

Because My Calling Is Such

Because my calling is such
I lose myself whole days
In some foul cistern or ditch,
How could mere woman’s love reach
Across the lampless silence
For the sake of that craze
Made blind Homer dance—

I, crouched in the rainless air
And choking with the dust?
Yet so bowed, the readier
To kiss your palm, my finger
Touching your fabulous face
Beyond all error and lust
In all that dark place.

For the trove of images
One gathers in the dark,
The dark that’s piled with refuse
I shall not curse the bright phrase,
Coronal of my eclipse;
Though had you wed a clerk
He’d have your red lips.

Not driven like a lazar
From his house and children,
His embraces as he were
Frog on your white sheets, my dear, have been driven away
Made mock of and rejected:
Who’d turn had you bidden
A prince on your bed.

Your complaint about my syntax reminds me of Bridges’ similar complaint to Hopkins and you know what happened to poor Bridges....
The love of a "mere woman" is not sufficient to enable her to comprehend or penetrate the "lampless silence" for the sake of poetry, that craze that made even blind Homer dance.

Though in eclipse, that is, disgraced, I do not curse the poetry nor the search for it in the dark which has brought me misfortune, though Had she met and married a clerk, she wd not have been wed to a frog-prince (poet) and therefore he wd. not have been driven away like a lazar.

The fifth line in this stanza also suggests that the poet is Christ, an image I also use in the last stanza of "Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom" when I speak of the "aggrieved king".

1W.B. Yeats, "The Tower (line 52);" see 138.4.
Dear Irving,

Many thanks for your insulting letter of March 12. Resorted to name-calling, have you? Sentimental philistine, eh? If its sentimental philistinism to admire & enjoy DH Lawrence & WB Yeats then I'm content to be known as such. Perhaps we've argued enough about your poem. You think it is one of your best, & I think it is one of your worst. On that we'll have to agree to differ. As I have said, I do not for a minute dispute your right to say what you have said in the poem, & in judging it as a poem I criticize it only on grounds of technique. That 'I' is wrong & no amount of shouting on your part will make it otherwise. But as a person, now, not as a literary critic (of sorts), and in a friendly, non-belligerent way, I should like to argue that the thought of the poem is misguided. I do not think that it is right to excuse or explain difficulties in love by saying in effect "I am a poet who must go into the darkness for images, and if this quest involves the sacrifice of love, so much the worse for love." It is not at all a matter of an adolescent with a hard-on saying that he must have a cunt at any cost. What I mean is that the love-relation between a man and a woman is more important than anything else. Now you'll call this sentimental philistinism I suppose--in which case you'll have to include Lawrence in the indictment. Here's what he says, & I agree with every word of it:

You musn't think that your desire or your fundamental need is to make a good career, or to fill your life with activity, or even to provide for your family materially. It isn't. Your most vital necessity in this life is that you shall love your wife completely and implicitly & in entire nakedness of body and spirit. Then you will have peace and inner security, no matter how many things go wrong.

And again he writes:

Once you've known what love can be, there's no disappointment anymore & no despair. If the skies tumble down like a smashed saucer, it couldn't break what's between Frieda and me. I'll
do my life-work, sticking up for the love between man and woman.1

Now we come to Yeats. You admit that "foul cistern or ditch" is a reminiscence of Yeats—and of course there’s nothing wrong with that. By saying you owed some of the poem to Yeats I wasn’t making a charge but simply stating a fact. I think you’re probably right that I was telescoping Yeats re "Blind Homer danced". But I can’t find anywhere in the poems that Yeats turns his back upon love or subordinates it to poetry. Love and art are his great values from beginning to end, and he regards them not as alternatives but as complementaries. His antinomies are nationalism & spiritualism (or mysticism rather), body and spirit, but not art and love. You know very well that that episode with Maud Gonne was not a choice of his poetry over his love for her, but rather a matter of their dispute over the proper approach to national revolution. For years he sought to win her love by his poetry, stating that the chief justification of his poetry is that it is a means of earning her love.

You’re twisting my remarks about his last poetry. I’ve always said that his last poems are remarkable for their combination of bitterness & gaiety. Of course there is suffering there, & of course (as I believe I said only two or three letters ago) there is an hysterical element in their gaiety. But to me the great thing about them is that even when old, sick, impotent he still declared his faith in sexual love—and even made it as you know into a cosmogony and a theology ("Ribh in Ecstasy"). To document my case further, I refer you to "Consolation" (p. 310, Collected Poems), "Her Vision in the Wood" (313), "Whence had they come?" (332), "The Wild Old Wicked Man" (356 ff), "News for the Delphic Oracle" (376), "A Stick of Incense" (383), "Politics" (392).

And of course the whole answer to the question about the gaiety of these last poems is in "Lapis Lazuli" (p. 338) & especially in the key line "Gaiety transfixing all that dread."

I’ve had several interruptions here in my office & have lost my steam—so I’ll not carry on today. I know that you revise your poems carefully & I don’t say that I am right in criticizing this poem—you may well be right. But I did want to be honest with you & not simply indulge in routine praise.

Love from myself & Mary.

As ever,
Des Pacey


2Pacey refers to page numbers from the 1950 edition of Macmillan’s The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats.
Sunday [March 15, 1959]

Dear Desmond,

Yesterday morning I attended a Teacher's Conference at McGill where Dr Conant, ex-President of Harvard and Dr Launeys of the University of London were the guest speakers. During the question period, I asked them what the schools were doing about the trivialization and the brutalization of the human mind & spirit that's going on all around us. They didn't even understand what I was talking about. Or they did, but being good bureaucrats, it didn't pay them to understand me. Whether they did or didn't, their asinine evasions confirmed my pessimism. Spiritual drought, dessication. And blindness, blindness, blindness. Everywhere. It takes different forms, but the essence is the same. Freshness, integrity, exploration, individuality...these things are as dead as the dodo. Louis' social realism, your own silly cheerfulness, the valour of ignorance.

Hugs,
Irv

1Teacher's Conference, McGill University 14 March 1959.


3Dr. Launeys, British educator.

Monday [March 16, 1959pm]

Dear Desmond,

The decision to be, and to remain, a poet is finally a heroic one for it is nothing else than to keep alive within one's self the creative oppositions and antimonies of his period. The tensions of our own period are more severe than those of any preceding one: we are witnessing the end of one economic & social order and the rise of another. Small wonder the most sensitive consciences of our times are pulled this way and that or ripped apart altogether. The important thing is not to allow one's self to become numb or complacent (as I think you tend to, away off as you are from the significant crossroads) and to mistake that complacency for courage. Your inability to "get into" a poem is a reflection of that complacency as is your eager-beaverishness to label every display of anguish "self-pity". Finally, the elongated penis is not the only yardstick for measuring the worth of a poem.

Hugs,
Irv
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your two cards.

I wish I could persuade you to cheer up a bit. You accuse me of silly cheerfulness and of complacency—but I could with equal justice accuse you of late of being sour and cynical. We know that the world is in a mess, that the trivialization & brutalization you speak of is all around us—but surely it’s as useful to laugh as it is to continually wail & beat the breast? I remember I.A. Richards saying to me in 1939¹ "It is good for man to be optimistic"—and I still think so. I try to make a show of cheerfulness even when I don’t feel it. Just the other day my grocery store lady said, "My Dr Pacey, you’re the happiest man I’ve ever met!"—now it so happened that I was feeling very depressed that day over some petty bickering within the faculty & because of severe stomach pains that have been bothering me lately—but I was whistling to keep my courage up & I gave her the impression of happiness. Would it have helped her or the world at all for me to have gone into her store with a sour look and a snide word?

Well, I’m beginning to sound like a Samuel Smiles² so I’d better stop. But I will enclose a little poem I’ve written, so that you may have the pleasure of tearing it apart. Do you think I should publish it somewhere, or do you think it is too silly?

Mary sends her love. At the moment she is doing a beautiful nude self-portrait which I tell her she should give me as a birthday present. Or would you like it? I can assure you it is hot stuff!

Love & kisses,

Des P

The Nature of a Critic

Who is the terrible Kildare Dobbs?

Frank Scott suggested his name should be Jobbs*;³

Another friend whispered, with a look of pure loathing,
"He’s only a sparrow, dressed up in swift’s clothing."
*Just-off-the-bloody-boat-stinker.

¹Pacey knew Richards from his years at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was a doctoral student in English Literature, 1938-41.

²Samuel Smiles (1812-1904), English newspaper editor and social advocate remembered for his Self-help (1859), which preached industry, thrift and self-improvement, and other works on similar themes: Character (1871), Thrift (1875) and Duty (1880).

³Scott made this observation in his letter of 3 September 1958 (see 173.4):

Kildare Dobbs
Is one of our latest J.O.B.B’s
A "Just Off the Bloody Boat"-man
A perpetually afloat-man.
Dear Desmond,

Thanks for your two letters. I enjoyed reading them. I’m glad you’re still with me.

Jews are never really cynical. They wd never have survived if they were. Their existence is an act of faith. And poets despair because they observe the world is not as full of wonder and joy for others as it is for them. Your homilies and Smilesian headshakings tickle me. They testify to your goodness of heart, but you must acquire a new vocabulary if you’re going to understand me. The usual words and stances simply won’t work.

So now it’s love you’re talking about and not sex. You’ve shifted your ground, but I’m still with you, and still grappling. The Lawrence passage you quote is known to me; it’s from some pamphlet of his which might be titled “Togetherness” but isn’t. Every great writer writes quantities of unedifying shit, embarrasing to his admirers. Lawrence is no exception. I nearly puked the first time I read this passage that pleases you so much, and seeing it again in your breathless scrawl gave me the same sick feeling. What astonishes me is not that D.H.L wrote it; what astonishes me is that you think this piece of domestic taradiddle is Lawrence’s last word on the man-woman relation. How anyone can think so with The Plumed Serpent, Kangaroo, Aaron’s Rod, The Rainbow etc, etc, on his shelf—or F.R. Leavis for those who need a guide—is beyond my flabbergasted comprehension. It shatters me, and almost shatters my hope that great writers can ever make themselves understood to the professoriat. Just consider how this looks to me. Here’s a writer who pours out novel after novel, poems, novelettes and short stories to warn against the current castration of the male by "love"; who insists over and over and over again that the most hateful thing is the bondage and violation of the Self, and that a woman despises the man who turns from his creative tasks to humour her ("love her") and that she’s right in so despising him—and the best you can do is quote this bleating, hysterical passage, the result of a moment’s weakness, as the Lawrencian gospel. I can almost pull out my arsehairs in rage and despair. It sickens me to think that no genius is safe from professorial asininity, and deepens my suspicions that we are in a worse plight than I imagined at first. Lawrence was a sick man, bent on healing himself, terribly dependent on Frieda. A less heroic soul than his would have surrendered to her. His struggle to keep his soul inviolate is a modern saga. You completely and ludicrously mis-read his "savage pilgrimage" and the whole intent of his writings which was to free men and women from the ridiculous "love-ethic" the foreshortened humans of our industrial age have come to accept. Why do Lawrence’s women pursue the "dark gods"? It is because men no longer set themselves creative tasks; they have no "dark gods" within them. In preference
to the broken males in office and factory she’d rather elope with a horse: that’s the plain meaning of "St Mawr." Your discussion of Yeats is so superficial, I think you must be joking. Though here, too, you’ve somewhat shifted your ground and now speak of Art and Love being complementaries for him, that is, experiences of equal value. Nothing in the poems you asked me to look at prove that Yeats would have surrendered his life as a poet for "luv". A poem doesn’t prove anything except that the man who wrote it enjoyed making it; that is, that he was a poet. Yeats would not have blotted out one single good line for luv—unless you accept this about artists you have not understood anything about them, and have little business speaking about them. Your cozy armchair philistinism and True Confession sentimentality is the suffocating miasma every true artist wars against. The war is a tragic one, unresolvable because the oppositions are eternal. The grass, no less than the tallest oaks are necessary. Even the stoutest condor needs the empty air to beat his wings against. Yeats understood this, just as he understood the other necessary antinomies of existence. For this reason he conceived life as tragic; I laughed out so loudly when you said he’d surrender one pole (poetry) to the other (love) it must have shattered the revealing epitaph on his grave in Drumcliff:

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death...

Sex, the marriage-bed, was Yeats’ "symbol of the solved antinomy". You vulgarize him horribly, you reduce a great poet to a sentimental lecher when you profess to see only a simple affirmation of sex or sensuality in his poetry.

I want to be terribly clear and terribly earnest about this. As a poet I am more susceptible to the fascination of women than most men are. Love and sex I reverence, and I’ve known a happiness with Betty and now with Aviva that few men have known and all may envy. Luckier than most I have been; so when I dub your outlook the spiritual polio of our age, it is not because I am ungrateful or soured. Compassion siezes and almost throttles me when I see the sexually repressed (married & unmarried) that make up our diseased bourgeois-Christian society. But I believe with Lawrence and Nietzsche that no woman ever loved a man who didn’t love something greater than either of them. The knowledge that you are in disagreement with me on this comforts and strengthens me.

So as long as you don’t like the poem because you don’t share my view on the man-woman, art-love relationship I am satisfied. Picasso would, as would Rodin, Napoleon, Stendhal, Yeats, Lawrence, Cromwell, Tolstoi, Byron, and all the other bygone heroes when men were men and horses were horses. It is a difference of outlook, Desmond, and we understand each other. I am forever opposed to your metaphysic: to me your gospel of romantic love is the expression of the castrated male of the machine age. Let’s
not have adjectives and expressions, then, like "cynical", "self-pity", "hardness", which is professorial armchair craperoo for a mystery, a way of living and thinking, you are simply unable to understand. You can keep them in reserve for minnows like Scott, Smith or Dudek.

If the "I" still bothers you, take an aspirin. It doesn't bother anyone else, and it wouldn't bother you if you dropped your armour-plated prejudices to the floor. And what's the sense of barking out "Yeats", "Yeats" because I employ the word "ditch", when Yeats himself used "wine-dark" twice in "Her Vision in the Wood" without anyone barking out "Homer" at him? You should get beyond such IBM methods of criticism. Love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses, Irv

PS Listen to your radio on Tuesday to the program Contact. Aviva and I are on it. My little one is getting more & more requests from the CBC. But she loves her teaching. Did I write you she is studying violin and ballet?

Your incomprehension astounds me: it's the sort of thing that made you completely mis-read what I had to say about Klein's lack of a "sense of evil". Anyone but you wd have seen I meant it "internally". His Psalms are completely empty of conflict.

When I first read "Cain" to you, you said you preferred "The Bull Calf" to it, for the former was laboured & artificial. What happened? Hugh Kenner took it for his book The Art of Poetry and Best Articles & Poems of 1958 asked for permission to reprint it. Now Milton Wilson has come out and said "Cain" is probably my best poem.

closure: photograph of Aviva Cantor, undated


2Lawrence, Kangaroo (London: Martin Secker, 1923).

3Lawrence, Aaron's Rod (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1922).


7Quoted on p.298 of A. Norman Jeffares' W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet.

8Layton is thinking of Yeats' statement in A Vision:

Pope Pius XI said in an Encyclical that the natural union of man and woman has a kind of sacredness. He thought doubtless of the marriage of Christ and the Church, whereas I see in it a symbol of that eternal instant where the antinomy is resolved.

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of March 21—a vigorous & interesting one, though it came perilously close to wounding me many times. Why do you feel it necessary to be so arrogant, so overbearing? I have to keep reminding myself that you have a tender, humble aspect of your personality to prevent myself from becoming disgusted with you. I don't know whether you realize it, but the tone of your remarks is very often one of contempt and derision. A friendship can only exist (for me at least) on a basis of rough equality and mutual respect.

You seem determined to put me in the wrong, even if it involves deliberate distortion. You accuse me of shifting my ground from sex to love, but my change of term was caused by your misinterpretation of my previous letter. When I spoke of sex, you started talking about adolescents with perpetual hards on—and of course that was not the kind of sexual relation I was talking about at all, so I had to shift the term.

When I quote Lawrence to you, you declare it's from some rotten pamphlet and that it isn't the real Lawrence. The passage is not from a pamphlet, but from a letter. It is quoted on p.178 of Aldington's book. After the passage I quoted Lawrence goes on: "You asked me once what my message was. I haven't got any general message...but this that I tell you is my message as far as I've got any." So he apparently took the passage more seriously than you do. Of course it's not fair to suggest that this is Lawrence's "last word" on the man-woman relationship—I didn't say it was. Lawrence was a man of many moods and tragic wars, and I well know one has to put beside this passage the many in which he spoke in other terms of love, of the necessity of keeping part of oneself private, for example, and not being smothered or seeking to smother the other partner. And even this passage has nothing to do with 'love' in quotation marks—that kind of 'love' has nothing to do with "entire nakedness of body & spirit". It's you who dragged 'love' in that mawkish sense into the discussion, not to further the argument but to put me in the wrong by fair means or foul.
And you have to throw in the aside about Klein’s sense of evil to make sure that you are making your infinite superiority perfectly clear.

And then you must become thoroughly derisive about my comments on Yeats--so superficial they made you laugh etc--in order to what? To tread me into the dust or to buttress your own ego? I’m not shifting my ground at all. To say that Art & Love for Yeats are complementaries is not inconsistent with what I said previously, which is simply that you would never find Yeats spurning "mere woman’s love" for the sake of poetry. I never said that he would have gone to the other extreme & have surrendered his poetry for love. The things are not antinomies, for him or for me. Love belongs to the order of experience, poetry to the order of expression.

That epitaph you refer to (it is not over the grave at Drumcliff, Mr Clever, for his remains are still abroad--the War intervened & the re-burial was never carried out1) is one of my favourite Yeatsian poems, but it does nothing to support your present cock-eyed view of Yeats. By "horseman pass by" he means to encourage man to continue his quest for knowledge, experience, vision, with all of which love (not in quotation marks) is involved. Since the horse in Yeats is almost always the symbol of the libido or of heroic energy & passion, love in the full sense is very much part of the experience being urged upon us.

You say that I "profess to see only a simple affirmation of sex or sensuality in his poetry"--which is such a distortion of what I said that it’s not funny but tragic. The word "simple" there does vulgarize Yeats--but that’s your word, not mine. I’m willing to back my sense of Yeats’ complexity against yours any day.

However, you do profess to be comforted & strengthened by the knowledge that I am in disagreement with you. Bully for you! Since you’re always right, ipso facto2 I’m always wrong!

By refusing to meet my arguments, and by continually twisting my words instead, you’ve got the argument to a point where it is almost completely irrelevant. Rather than really grappling with me intellectually, you’ve been tripping, gouging, mocking, dodging & generally acting like the member of a goon squad.

I enjoy our correspondence immensely, & I think we can clarify our thinking & feeling about life & art if we remain on the basis of mutual respect. But I’m not going to enjoy it if you’re going to insist forever on addressing me from some Olympian height of the Great Artist to the little moron. I’ve studied Yeats & Lawrence, among other people, very intensively for years, and I’m damned if I’m going to let some two-bit Montreal versifier indict me of moronic ignorance. If Scott & Dudek are such minnows, how can you be sure you’re such a bloody big shark?

“So as long as you don’t like the poem because you don’t share my view of the man-woman relation I am
satisfied." God! That's exactly what I said was not the basis of my criticism. I declared your right to say anything you liked, & criticized the poem on grounds of technique alone. My only point about the content (& I said I was speaking now as a person, not as a critic) was that I felt you were not really expressing your deepest convictions in it, not being sincere in the best sense of that word. I still refuse to believe that you see poetry & love as antinomies, & that your separation from Betty constituted a rejection of "mere woman's love" in favour of the dark ditch in which you make your poetry. I'm sure you had adequate reasons for that separation, & the last thought in my mind is to reproach you for it, but I don't believe the reasons are the ones put forward in this poem.

As for "Cain" & Mr Kenner & Mr Wilson--well, I don't guarantee to be right in a snap judgment after hearing any poem read. Nor of course do I necessarily assume that I am wrong because Messrs Kenner & Wilson disagree with me. But I have been wrong, I may be wrong now, & I've no doubt I shall be wrong again. It is only you who are always right.

Aviva looks lovely. Thanks for sending her photo, which I shall treasure. Mary sends her love--and I don't mean 'love'.

As ever,
Des P

1Yeats died in France in 1939; "He was buried in the cemetery at Roquebrune, but his body has been brought back to Drumcliffe churchyard in Sligo." Norman Jeffares, NE Yeats: Man and Poet 297-98.

2Latin: by the very fact, in the very nature of it.

232. 

Dear Desmond,

The enclosed poem is to take your mind off your troubles and stop your cursing. Shortliffe wants a poem for his summer issue which he's devoting to recent Canadian poetry. This is a fine summer poem, I think.1

In the heat of my polemics with you I forgot to thank you for the offer of Mary's self-nude (in jest, surely) and to tell you how much I enjoyed your "Darekill" poem. Your review in the CF of Gustafson's anthology, for a chap who can't tell a good poem from a hole in the ground, was a miracle of compression and good taste. I liked your cautioning of A.J.M. Smith, the directness with which you made your points. Altogether, one of your best efforts.

Phyllis Webb is in town. She plans to go on to Toronto, the city of lost souls. Probably become a rattler and produce bones.2 All my love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving

PS Rattler--a CBC type
Bones--products of the above.
enclosure: ts "I Know the Dark and Hovering Moth"

1 Irving Layton, "I Know the Dark and Hovering Moth," Queen's Quarterly 66.2 (summer 1959): 284-85.

2 Phyllis Webb began working as a free-lance broadcaster for the CBC in 1955; she worked in Toronto as a full-time program organizer 1964-67.

233.[pc] 3360 Ridgewood Ave, Montreal, Que Wednesday [March 25, 1959pm]
Dear Desmond,
There should be no The before sun in the last line. It should read as follows:
Sun pendent between them like a ball.

"I hope in my reply to my last brew
You're cooking up a poisonous stew."
Love to Mary

Hugs,
Irving

234. Friday [late March, 1959?]
Dear Desmond,
Never mind the explosion and smoke, ie, my noise and bombast.
If you'll look at the target you'll see a bullet hole dead centre.

Affectionately,
Irving

235.[pc] Thursday [March 26, 1959pm]
Dear Desmond,
Damn braces; Bless relaxes, said Blake.¹
But thanks for ticking me off. My tone had probably grown too polemical for friendship. I don't mean to be arrogant or overbearing—or at least I don't think I do—it's just a manner of arguing I picked up in the thirties in radical groups.² There's no man I respect more than I do you, or for whom I have a greater affection. Believe that always. There is certainly a difference in outlook and temperament between us, and I'm trying desperately to define it. Apparently I've touched a raw nerve or two, and I'm genuinely sorry. I promise you it shan't happen again.
Your letters mean a very great deal to me; your patience and good-humoured needling of my "artistic pretensions" are medicine to my soul. I wish I were near you so that I might have the benefit of them always. And you don't mind slapping back. Good. I shall write you a long & modest letter this Sat. Love to you & Mary.

Irving
enclosure: ts "I Know the Dark and Hovering Moth" (revised)


2In the late 1920s and the 1930s, Layton was a member of the Young People's Socialist League, the Young People's Labour League, the Canadian Labour Defence League, the National Committee for World Peace and the Young Communist League.

March 26, 1959

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of Tuesday. I hesitate to say this, since you will probably assume either that I am afraid of incurring your wrath again or anxious to make up to you, but Mary and I both enjoyed your new poem tremendously. We think it is far better than the previous one, and that it has clarity, directness, subtlety & power all at once. Mary especially seemed to like the final line or two, but we really enjoy all parts of it.

Thanks for your kind words re my little squib re Kildare Dobbs, my review of Gustafson, & my offer of Mary's self-portrait. I thought Mary was going to explode when she read that part of your letter--she did not of course know that I had even told you of the self-portrait!

Last night we were lazy & went to a movie--the Reluctant Debutante--a very deft, witty comedy which I recommend to you if you ever feel too tired to work or write.

I am working hard on William Faulkner these days--I've admired him ever since my student days at Toronto, & now I'm to give an honours seminar on him. What a tremendous talent his is! And what a splendid human being!

As ever,

Des Pacey


2Pacey was an undergraduate at Victoria College, University of Toronto 1934-38.

March 29, 1959

Dear Desmond,

What you said about my "gouging", not playing fair, etc, disturbed me so much, I re-read all your letters of recent weeks as carefully as I could, and tried to see how much justification there was in your charge. I was relieved greatly to find there wasn't any, and that if there had been twisting and sidestepping, they had not been resorted to by me but by yourself. I regret the insults and apologize for them, but as the enclosed Excerpts & Comments should make clear you went into the argument rather confused and poorly equipped.
I like a good argument, and I don’t mind the name-calling at all. It doesn’t decrease my affection for you when you call me a "two-bit poet". That’s all in the fun, the give-and-take and rough-and-tumble of controversy. Still, if it annoys you, I’ll drop my arrogant tone and adopt one more agreeable to you. If I am arrogant and fierce, it is not because my vanity is hurt; it’s because I think the poet has chosen a difficult and tragic vocation—the most difficult and tragic of all—and I resent deeply anything which detracts from its grandeur. I do not think the poet can be fierce or arrogant enough today; and he must be both if he’s going to survive at all. He has more to fear from his friends than his avowed enemies. It’s for this reason I fight you and Louis as bitterly as I do. Your approach (don’t get angry with me again) is the purest philistinism and your effort to make it seem anything but that, to make it seem heroic, or wise, or sane is, to an embattled poet like myself, wondrous strange but unconvincing. Dudek’s approach, as of today, is the merest self-justificatory opportunism, a surrender of the ramparts to the very bourgeois he pretends to be attacking. Do not judge me too harshly. Like Luther, I can do no other.¹ And with Blake I say: "The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction."² Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

PS I’m glad you & Mary like my second poem. Did you get the revised version? Also the second edition of A Laughter in the Mind?


PACEYISMS AND COMMENTS

1. I’m afraid this poem baffles me. I can’t make out the syntax. I’ve read it about ten times, but I just don’t get it...I gather that what you are saying in general is that though your calling as a poet compels you to go into the dark to seek images, you are not contemptuous of the bright love which your girl keeps for you...I’m not silly enough to say that the poem is not good—all I say is that I did not find it a clear communication to me.

Letter, Dated March 4, 1959

Comment: A complete misreading of the poem.
2. You certainly never heard Yeats deride love as 'mere woman's love'; The man was far too honest to pretend that he preferred poetry or anything else to a good fuck...Don’t tell me that you’re going to retreat from your honesty into this kind of fakery—that your goddam poetry is so mysterious & important that for it you’d jettison the love of a woman? If that’s the price of poetry, it’s too damn dearl...Why should a woman’s love reach across the darkness for the sake of poetry? She’s not reaching for poetry, but for a penis, and let’s face it.

Letter, Dated March 10, 1959.

Comment. Again, despite my explanatory letter, another misreading of the poem. I was not saying I had jettisoned the love of a woman for my poetry, but that 'mere woman's love' (note the intentional ambiguity) was not able to reach across the 'lampless silence' in which all poets live. This is by no means a shocking statement to make, though cosy Biedermeyers might think so, since in their time Shelley, Byron, Tolstoi, Strindberg, Rilke, and I don’t know how many other writers have made it. The reference to Yeats struck me then and still strikes me as a piece of vulgar sentimentalism. My attack made you modify your position on Yeats and to elevate the discussion to higher plane where you now spoke of the antinomies of Art and Love. Nevertheless, with incredible self-righteousness and as if delivering the tablets at Mount Sinai, you accused me of fakery, though in your next letter to me you went on to say you did not dispute my right to say anything I wanted to say in verse. And poets are supposed to be illogical, confused, and muddle-headed! Your trouble, my friend, is that you share the illusions of your tribe in thinking that poets write poems to be commented upon and annotated by professors of English; not that it is a human document of the highest value precisely because it is the only realm where freedom is absolute. With Yeats I say the poet 'speaks a barbarous tongue'. With him, too, I say:

But I, whose virtues are the definitions
Of the analytic mind, can neither close
The eye of the mind nor keep my tongue from speech.

(The People)

3. Perhaps we have argued enough about your poem. You think it is one of your best and I think it is one of your worst...I should like to argue that the thought of the poem is misguided. I do not think that it is right to excuse or explain difficulties in love by saying in effect "I am a poet who must go into the darkness for images and if this quest involves the sacrifice of love, so much the worse for love." What I mean is that the love-relationship between a man and a woman is more
important than anything else. Now you'll call this sentimental philistinism I suppose— in which case you'll have to include Lawrence.

Letter, Dated March 16, 1959

Comment. From saying (vide supra) that you’re not going to be silly enough to assert that the poem is not good, you’ve now decided that the poem is one of my worst. Since I know you will one day be judged by that remark (as well as by others) I wanted to warn you away from that position as crudely as I could. I meant that as a friendly office, however intemperately I wrote. When I say I am equally indifferent to praise or blame, I mean each word with utter and passionate sincerity. I alone know when a poem is successful, as you could easily convince yourself if you took the trouble to study the numerous revisions I make of the poems I have written and sent you. A poet doesn’t work that hard to earn anybody’s praise but to satisfy a far harder taskmaster—the demon inside him. And I know beyond a shadow of doubt or uncertainty that this poem is not only good, but great, one of the finest lyrics in the English language. Everyone who has seen the poem has been moved by it in the same way; everyone thinks with me it’s one of the few I shall be remembered by. Everyone includes Purdy (the hardest to please); Leonard Cohen; Phyllis Webb (just back from Paris)...Again you misread the poem, and again wax eloquently self-righteous on your misunderstanding. I might have said and other writers might have said with me that if the quest for poetry ‘involves the sacrifice of love, so much the worse for love’—but I do not say it in this poem. However to keep the argument stirring, I went along with you and now argued the question whether Lawrence & Yeats would agree with you that the ‘love-relation’ between a man and a woman is more important than anything else. I disagreed with you that the love-relation between man and woman etc, etc and said that neither Lawrence nor Yeats would share your opinion, this being, as I said bluntly, the notion of a comfortable armchair philistine who likes his literature watered. Your further statement in the same letter that "For years Yeats sought to win her (MG’s) love by his poetry, stating that the chief justification of his poetry is that it is a means of earning her love" was, I said, simply not true. Here, too, as with your discussion on Lawrence my attack made you shift your ground and you took refuge in vague talk about ‘complexities, antinomies, and complementaries’ when the clear question that you failed to answer by your shifting evasions and deft sidestepings was ‘would they have given up their writing for the women they loved?’ I said, NO; and you, for all your windy mutterings, could not say: Yes. You still can’t say
'Yes'. AND that, my good friend, is what we were arguing about. If you do not think so, read over my letters again. It was because I thought you were making a couple of Biedermeyers out of Lawrence and Yeats that I became insulting.

4. That epitaph you refer to (it is not over the grave at Drumcliff, Mr Clever, for his remains are still abroad...and the re-burial was never carried out) is one of my favourite Yeatsian poems, but it does nothing to support your present cockeyed view of Yeats. By horseman pass by he means to encourage man to continue imperturbably his quest for knowledge, experience, vision, with all of which love is involved. Since the horse in Yeats is almost always the symbol of the libido or of heroic energy and passion, love in the full sense is very much part of the experience being urged upon us...By refusing to meet my arguments and by continually twisting my words instead, you've got the argument to a point where it is almost completely irrelevant. Rather than really grappling with me intellectually, you've been tripping, gouging, dodging, and generally acting like the leader of a goon squad.


Comment: He was buried in the cemetery at Roquebrune, but his body has been brought back to Drumcliffe Churchyard in Sligo, where his ancestor had been rector. He had wished to be buried there 'under bare Ben Bulben's head', and his epitaph, with its consistent emphasis on the unusual, *the inhuman*, was written for this place he loved.

(W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet by Jeffares. My italics) So much, then, for my funereal error, and my cockeyed view of Yeats, which it would seem his biographer is also benighted enough to share. As for some peculiar reason every other well-informed and intelligent person who has ever written on Yeats seems also to share. Read, for instance Koch's book, *WB Yeats: The Tragic Phase*. Not that in my letters, mind you, I actually defined in very definitive terms what my view of Yeats was. I simply asserted that he would not have given up poetry for Maud Gonne or for anyone else he might have loved, and when you accuse me of twisting the argument I can only smile bitterly. What's the good of being clear-headed in the world when there are a lot of muddle-headed duffers like you and Dudek around, men who cannot or will not think straight, but think a slimy moralizing bent is a substitute for the passionate exercise of the intellect? My great trouble, and I have always suffered from it, is that the invectives your mental laziness and dishonesties goad me into enable you to slip away by the unheroic device of blinding me with my own vituperative mud.
But the argument is not the mud. I do get heated up and say things in my heat that I afterwards regret, but that is only because I take the search for truth seriously and assume that my adversary has the same disinterestedness and courage in pursuing it that I have. Not that I call you a philistine is what matters, or that I think myself Mr Clever, but whether your reading and criticism of the poem is correct, or your understanding of the personality of the great writer. There's no point in sneering at me. I am passionate, tenacious, and ill-tempered. Most writers worth their salt generally are. For that reason they are also generally unpleasant and uncomfortable to be with. When you say, as you do in your last letter to me, dated March 26th, that Faulkner is a splendid human being, I can only smile wanly. Will you never learn, Desmond; even from the Yeats you profess so much admiration for?

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.
When all the story's finished, what's the news?
In luck or out the toil has left its mark:
That old perplexity an empty purse,
Or the day's vanity, the night's remorse.

I cannot find in the Aldington biography of Lawrence the letter you refer to. Perhaps that's because my edition is the English while yours is the American. I remember distinctly reading the passage you quoted in a pamphlet, for I did not have Lawrence's letters. I believe the pamphlet is still around here somewhere in my library and I shall try to find it. Of course it may be the passage in question occurs in both for it was not uncommon for Lawrence to transcribe material from letters to books and vice versa. Most writers do, as I did just recently in using 'minnows' and 'poets, each the resurrected Christ' in the poem I sent you after I had written them in letters. But had you been honest in your search for the truth about Lawrence and Frieda, you would have found this in Aldington's book:

You see he is different, he is dangerous
Without pity or love.
And yet how his separate being liberates me
And gives me peace....

(Lawrence: One Woman to All Women)

But you were interested in scoring a point, not really in finding out what Lawrence thought about the man-woman relation. You still want to throw sand in my eyes. You still huff and puff. But nowhere do you answer the direct question my letters put to you: Did
Lawrence believe that a woman could only love a man who loved something greater than either of them? Could Lawrence—the crux of the argument—have abandoned his writing for Frieda? Would he really have asserted that the 'love-relation' was the most important thing in the world—which is what you have him assert. Nowhere do you answer this clearly but like a freshman debater you set about knocking vigorously on the head the straw men you've created, or as in the case of Yeats resorting to a bluff camaraderie with an imagined sensuality that imposes upon no one but yourself. You have a penchant also for pulling the wool over your adversary's eyes, but that is doubtless because you have first succeeded in pulling the wool over your own eyes and mistake the game of blind man's bluff for literary criticism. Thus you assert blandly in your letter, dated March 16th, that the reason Yeats closed the door to poor hunted Maud Gonne (the woman you say he'd have given up his poetry for) was because of 'a dispute over the proper approach to the national revolution'. That's piffle, and you know it as well as I do. But forced into the position where you'd have to agree that the 'great lover' valued his own security more than he did the safety of the woman he 'loved' you lightly resorted to this piece of innocent fabrication. Here's what his biographer says about the episode:

Mrs Yeats was recovering from an extremely severe attack of influenza, which had developed into pneumonia and was, besides, expecting a child in February, and W.B. Yeats thought that the possibility of police searches and raids upon the house might cause a relapse...There was a violent quarrel between the old friends. p.211

(WB Yeats: Man and Poet, Jeffares)

Or you will say you do not like the theme of my poem (Letter, dated March 10th) when it is quite clear from your comments that you do not understand the poem at all; and in the same letter speak confidently as follows: 'I hate the self-pity and I abhor that identification with Christ' when it is equally clear that the tone and attitude of the poem have been completely thrown away upon you, and that you are lost in the woods and mistake your sudden starts and nervous shoutings for pugnacity and the promptings of courage. Like my erstwhile friend Louis, you are angry with me because I do not charmingly allow myself to be imposed upon. All right, to keep a friend, I might allow myself to appear deceived. But is that what you want? I'm quite sure it isn't, though I might have kept Louis for my friend, and even Betty had I been able to curb my acerbities. Though I would not think of comparing myself to the great Tolstoi, these words by Gorky might equally well have been written of me: "His surroundings
became like a desert where everything is scorched by the sun and the sun itself is smoldering away, threatening a black and eternal night." Like him I am a truth-seeker, and long long ago learned the self-deceptions, vanities, and cowardly evasions that people live by. In my poem all I said was that I lost my wife and two children because I happen to be a poet, and that if I had been a clerk this calamity would not have happened to me. It happens to be the simple truth. But like all brave sentimentalists who write courageously in their armchairs about 'honesty', 'artistic courage', 'integrity' etc, etc, without the foggiest notion of what these words mean and how much real sacrifice these words require, you did not want the truth but had to reduce it to the grisly sentimentalities of True Confessions and to compound your crime by vulgarizing & sentimentalizing Yeats and Lawrence. Here again you remind me of Dudek. We once saw Synge's play together, Playboy of the Western World. He was convinced the play was a pleasant spoofing of the national characteristics of the Irish. When I convinced him and the assembled company (after the play we had gone to some faculty member's home) that the playboy was the last poet of the world and that Synge was saying some extremely bitter things about the place of poetry in contemporary society and that the poet had better become hard and pitiless, he was much put out, not with his superficiality but with me for having revealed it to him. He also thought The Key was a submarine story. And then we're expected to take his lectures on poetry, his reviews and articles seriously. I admit I'm too hardboiled and I'm too shrewd for this sort of thing. Also, I know the cost of poetry and how very few are those able or willing to pay it. This is the reason I cannot let you or Louis get away with easy, sentimental generalizations about poets and poetry. If I am arrogant it is not for my sake but for theirs.

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238. March 30, 1959

Dear Desmond,

Yesterday I mailed you a letter and some typewritten sheets in which I excerpted extracts from your recent letters and made my own comments on them. I tried to be impartial and polite, but now considering my secret hostility to critics and professors of English, I wonder if I altogether succeeded. Probably not. Why am I so hostile, even with you, who mean me nothing but friendship and good will? The answer is after all ludicrously simple. It's that I resent what appears to me to be your easier role in life, your cool examination of what makes me freeze and burn by turns. And like one of Dostoevsky's characters I look for anything you say which might trip you up, rob you of
your self-assurance and complacency. I want you down in the abyss with me, and I want you without a shred of covering, without the facile explanations that spring into a professor's mouth when he's in the classroom. The integrity of a poet is different from what you suppose; it's the awareness of division and evil, and his uneasiness before the fact of his own nature. Since these are what baffle him, he regards the seeming certainties of others with sullen suspiciousness, feeling they have purchased their cheerful mien and heartiness with the false coin of indifference. Yeats torn between the would-be saint and the enchanter, the man of action and the poet, the sensualist and the sage, knew the kind of despair I am speaking of. Nothing came easy to him; he invented the Mask because he had much to hide. At the end, worn out by the irreconcilable opposites within himself, he sought a covering shell in an art that would be inhuman and aloof. An artifact, singing to the lords and ladies of Byzantium, metallic and itself unmoved. For this reason I find your explanation of the "Horseman, pass by" on his epitaph so fanciful and far-fetched. He was now done with loving and hating, with experiencing...Done with them forever.

Don't let my rough manners scare you away. Beneath the heaped pile of self-dramatization, abuse, and sheer nonsense there's a good poet buried somewhere--one growing stronger and wiser with the years' passing.

All the best,
Irving

PS I can't find anywhere Yeats using the phrase "piled with refuse". He uses "rubbish". I used the word refuse because I wished to suggest refusal which in the context of the poem is very appropriate. IL

1Yeats explains his concept of the "Mask" in A Vision: Man seeks his opposite or the opposite of his condition...All unity is from the Mask and the antithetical Mask is described in the automatic script as a "form created by passion to unite us to ourselves," the self so sought is that Unity of Being compared by Dante in the Convito to that of "a perfectly proportioned body." W.B. Yeats, A Vision 82.


239. March 31, 1959
Dear Desmond,

The Chinese communists have crushed Tibetan "rebels"1 and Kassim in Iraq is virtually a prisoner of the Communists in that country.2 Meanwhile the president of Carleton College, ex-CBC head, tells us plainly we're talking much but doing little about education.3 He's convinced, as I have been for a long time, that the issue of the Cold War will be settled on the blackboard; not on the battlefield. When a class is condemned by History, it first paralyzes
their brains. Where are our poets to sing our tragedy, our Peloponnesian defeat? Where are our poets to sing our tragedy, our Peloponnesian defeat? We need an Alexander Blok, someone with the passion and imagination to feel and see the invisible knife in our innards. The theme staggers my mind. Our poets, even the best of them, are dandies or poisoned rats. Prufrockian Eliot, "I-won't-go-into-the-dark-again" Frost, raving Social-Crediting Ezra--what a silly lot, when you once begin to think of what the real issues before Western man today are. I've just finished Milosz's The Captive Mind. The poet can only warn nowadays--he has no power, and in the West where he is most needed his name is mud, his place taken by the militant mediocrities of journalism or politics or the canting farts of church and school. We are in for a bad time: History will yet write her dearest lessons on all our backs. I once wrote "the best part of any man today is the hell he carries inside him". I think this would make an excellent epitaph for contemporary western civilization--for any civilization condemned to the rubbish bin.

Recently, to change the subject for a less gloomy one--I studied Lampman's "Heat" with my class: some things struck me about the poem that never had before. I believe you've an essay on the poem which you published, and I'm wondering if you would have a reprint of it you might let me have. I wish to see whether you've said the same things I have in mind. Assuming you haven't, wd you care to hear my interpretation of it? It's the paradox of the last two lines of the poem which I set out to explain. You once mentioned you had written a review of M. Waddington's most recent book. When was it published? I suppose you've heard by now that they are separated.

All my love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

1 Fighting between Tibetan rebels and occupying Communist Chinese forces broke out March 13 when Chinese troops fired on crowds demonstrating to affirm their loyalty to the Dalai Lama. Chinese forces crushed the revolt in ten days and the Dalai Lama fled to India.

2 The Iraqi political scene was dominated during the winter of 1958-59 by the rapid growth of Communist influence; after the suppression of a conspiracy against the government in December, Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kassem formed a new cabinet of moderates in February, but its power was curtailed by the influence exercised over Kassem by a group of pro-Communist officers.

3 Davidson Dunton (1912-87), Chairman, Board of Governors, CBC 1945-58, President and Vice-Chancellor of Carleton University 1958-72, Co-Chair, Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism 1963-70.

4 The Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) between rival Greek city-states Athens and Sparta ended Athenian dominance and marked the beginning of the end of Greek civilization.

5 Alexander Blok (1880-1921), poet and dramatist, Russian Symbolist who came to scorn the sterile intellectualism of the bourgeois symbolists and to embrace Bolshevism; the Bolshevists in turn rejected his aesthetic aspirations.
Layton alludes to Eliot's famous "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (Prufrock and Other Observations 1917); the final stanza ("The woods are lovely, dark and deep, /But I have promises to keep...") of Frost's "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" (New Hampshire 1923), and the economic philosophy of Social Credit espoused by Ezra Pound.


Layton believes he wrote this in a letter or in some other unpublished form, such as a notebook.


See 222.1.

See 202.4.

April 5, 1959

Dear old Irving,

Thank you for your several postcards, letters, revisions of poems, & the second edition of A Laughter—all of which have been deeply appreciated & enjoyed.

I feel embarrassed at having compelled you to apologize, as you do so handsomely, for your occasional arrogance in argument. I shouldn’t be so vulnerable, and I certainly should realize that all your insults are delivered in the heat of the fray and have no malicious intent.

There are so many things in your recent communications that cry out for discussion that I don’t know where to begin. In your first postcard you say "There is certainly a difference in outlook and temperament between us and I am trying desperately to define it." Well, there is a difference (although of course we have a great deal in common) & I suppose it can be explained by our differences in background. Without going into an impossibly long account of my own background, I can’t really make all this clear, so in what I say next I’m going to indulge in dangerous over-simplification. I think we have both been repeatedly wounded by & in life, but we have reacted in almost opposite ways. I have grown cautious, wary, and have drawn in my horns, settling into a shell of domesticity out of which I venture with a placating grin, jabs that are only in fun (note the little jabs at Smith in my Gustafson review), scholarly books that are dull & correct & unimpeachable as to fact but terribly unadventurous as to opinion, grey little short stories that have a kind of wan, wistful self-pity. It is only as a teacher that I cast off the shell boldly (I enclose a review of The Picnic which will give outside evidence of the fact that as a lecturer I am bold & iconoclastic), lose myself, & really become a stimulating human being. There—and in my letters to you, & in groups of congenial people whom I can trust, where I tend
to be the "life of the party" type & say & do outrageous things just for the hell of it. But for all this, the real me, I am afraid, is the timid, wary person, with my home as my anchor (hence my instinctive rejection of your making light of "mere woman's love".) Now I've not gone into the reasons why I'm so timid & wary & even cowardly at times—but they exist. Just to hint at them—my father was killed when I was ten months old, my mother had what would now be called a nervous breakdown, my grandfather (having lost his only son) became an alcoholic (& lost all the money that bought that Cadillac I mentioned in my "New Zealand Memories"), I was taken as a small child to England & shunted from relative to relative while my mother worked as a nurse etc etc. I early had the feeling of being an outcast, of being unwanted, of belonging nowhere, as back & forth I shuttled between New Zealand, England, New Zealand, England, Canada, England, travelling "in care of the Guard", met by strange aunts & uncles & reluctantly sheltered by them for a few weeks while their own children made clear their resentment of me, & so on. Well, to cut the self-pity, when I went (as a scholarship student in a second-hand suit far too large for me, given by the local minister) to the University of Toronto & found 1) that as a scholar & budding critic I was not only accepted as an equal but as a superior by much more sophisticated students and 2) that the prettiest and most sought-after girl of the year, Mary Carson, was willing to accept me as her lover—I suddenly found ground on which to stand. And to that ground I've clung, tenaciously. Of course, I've been lucky. Mary might have been an empty-headed dizzy blonde—I would then have fallen for any girl who was nice to me. But she is just about as perfect a woman as was ever created—and so for me personally there is no doubt that the love-relation between man & wife is the most important thing in the world.

So you see when you say in a later letter that you "resent" my "easier role in life" and that you want me down in the abyss with you, I can only smile. I'm like the character in Auden's poem,

...poised between shocking falls on razor-edge
Has taught himself this balancing subterfuge
of the accosting profile, the erect carriage.4

My God, man, I've inched my way out of that abyss a thousand times, & I can be plunged into it with the flick of a finger.

I didn't mean to talk this much about myself. I've more or less implied, I think, where we differ. I don't know just what your experiences were, but I can guess, & in some ways they were probably more devastating than mine. But you reacted differently: instead of retreating into wariness, you marched out with both fists cocked. Rather than clinging to the safe ground, you ventured into all sorts of dangerous places, & became not a critic but a poet.
Yours was the finer way, the more creative way. You chose the better mask. In many ways I envy you. And you have a right to discount many of my critical opinions, because they often are simply the cowardly man urging the brave man to be more careful.

Well, I've used up my time & energy for the moment. I shall have to write you again in a few days about your new poem & its revisions, & to discuss further our dispute about your previous poem. I still think you were guilty of a few low punches—but so was I. It was unfair of me to bring up Yeats' burial place (& different books say different things about it—I'm going to try & solve the question in the next few days) which was really quite irrelevant to your argument. The Lawrence letter is on p.178 of the Duell, Sloan & Pierce edition of Aldington's biography.

I sent you an offprint of my article on Lampman's "Heat" yesterday.

My review of Miriam W is to be in the next Fiddlehead. I hadn't heard about their separation—how sad, if true—I liked them both, & especially Patrick.

Love,
Des Pacey

1 See 203.5.

2 Pacey is probably referring to Weekes' review:
To one with but a modest acquaintance with its author, The Picnic and Other Stories comes as just a bit of a surprise, albeit a pleasant one, displaying as it does a tentative and almost hesitant quality which is not to be found in Professor Pacey's academic appearances (123).


3 William Pacey died at Passchendaele or Viny Ridge on March 26, 1918.

4 "But Poised between shocking falls on razor-edge
Has taught himself this balancing subterfuge
Of an accosting profile, an erect carriage."


April 5, 1959

Dear Desmond,

I've read your article on Lampman—and take it all back. You can tell a good poem when you see one, and moreover can write brilliantly on it. My impatience with you has led me to do you an injustice and once again I apologize for it. There's nothing I can add or take away from what you have written about Lampman's poem. You've "cracked" that poem completely. The wheel is the symbol of the unity of opposites. It's interesting to see how Lampman has brought in the various forms of life—flower, insects, birds, animals and Man as if to stress that all of life on this earth is caught up in this fusion of opposites—they
all make up the circle! I also find significance in the following lines:

The burning skyline blinds my sight.

and

In the sloped shadow of my hat
I lean at rest...

Thank you for sending the article. All my love to Mary.

Affectionately,

Irving

enclosure: "What’s New in the Arts: Pepper in the Poet’s Pot," Chatelaine, April 1959, and ts "On Evil as...:

On Evil as the Necessary Extension of Being
or
The Twentieth Century as Seen Through the Arsehole of a Duck

I define evil as that which injures another fellow-being.
Evil is entirely human.

- 1 -

All goodness because it is conventional and predictable is limiting. Imaginative men, and men of vigorous instincts, resent the restrictions which the moral expectations of men impose upon their actions. These expectations are the enemy of spontaneity; they limit one’s freedom of movement. What one resents is the ‘externality’ of virtue: the obligation to pay one’s debts, to be just and kind, temperate in speech, etc. It is not that these obligations run contrary to our so-called primitive cravings; it is that they violate our craving for freedom, even our freedom to wish to do good. If I tell a man he is honourable, I have made him my prisoner.

- 2 -

The hatred for goodness arises from many sources. In our own epoch, it springs from the awareness, enforced by everyday observation, that good people are also impotent people, powerless before the great dynamic forces which are transforming our lives in the 20th century. One naturally wishes to attach oneself to the winning side; at any rate, not to appear backward and foolish. All cynicism is a backhanded compliment to virtue. It is also the effluvium which a ‘moral universe’ in decay leaves in its wake.

Nevertheless, we can never be certain our choice was a wise one, and in the degree doubt enters our minds to the same degree do we dislike and attack goodness, acquiring paradoxically the virtues of courage, resolution, and clear-sightedness in our desperate attempt to stamp out virtue altogether. If a wicked man persisted in his wickedness, he would become a saint.
The existence of evil is necessary to our happiness and for that reason alone can never be eliminated. Consider: it enables each of us to torment our friends and relations, since we can always reproach them for harbouring it within themselves. This is perhaps the greatest single satisfaction in the lives of human beings, as anyone who has ever overheard two people discussing another person would perhaps agree. A related satisfaction, again made possible by the knowledge that evil exists in all of us, is that one can provoke our virtuous friends to display their defective side so that afterwards we can enjoy their humiliation and our own triumph and and feelings of superiority. That no individual is altogether free from taint, but has weaknesses which can be made to rise to the surface, however secret their hiding-place or submerged under the appearance of virtue, only adds to the certainty of the pleasure that is within one's grasp. The eagerness to unmask one's friend or relative is moreover stimulated by the strangest compliment of all which vice pays to virtue: I mean, the feeling that goodness must be absolute; not merely grey but a dazzling white. Despair at ever finding such purest distillation of virtue accounts no doubt for the moral scab-pulling described above. It is as if we thought all virtue was hypocrisy and goodness itself a mask for evil. Romantic and immature though such an attitude may be, it yet springs from some uncorrupted innocency of the heart. It is the voice of the innocent child in each of us refusing to accommodate itself to the counsel of experience. But let us move on to consider another phenomenon of the spirit, no less strange than the ones already described. It is this: the knowledge that evil is present in each human soul is at the same time an incitement to us to discover its opposite, for we can no more live all damned than all blessed, and this affords us numerous occasions for breathless confessions, reconciliations, the entire Faustian melodrama of penitence and redemption, etc, etc. It is not surprising the bourgeoisie developed and perfected the novel for here the bourgeois, on fire to destroy all human ties, found both atonement and entertainment. It is extremely doubtful whether the novel will survive the disappearance of the class which gave it birth and whose inner conflicts it both dignified and dramatized. A system of planned production for use, that is, socialism, by eliminating wasteful economic conflicts at the same time eliminates tragedy: its favourite art form will be the documentary--facts without moral significance.

That the desire for evil springs from the love of goodness itself is the greatest paradox that confronts us. We wish evil to remain because we love equality and prefer to think
that everyone has been tarred with the same brush as ourselves. Vaunting pretensions are therefore circumvented at the start and whoever wishes to elevate himself above his fellow-men feels the drag of a terrible metaphysical anchor pulling him downward. No doubt this does not prevent him from achieving eminence but it prevents him from enjoying it, and if he is weak he may decide that the price he must pay for his separation from the herd is too great. On the other hand his gnawing doubts and resentments may lead him to turn upon his inferiors with all the fury of a wounded animal. If Nero fiddled it was because he had a bad conscience. And in so far as we dislike complacency, smugness, philistine optimism—all evils, surely: the dislike of them proving our partial goodness—we value and rejoice in the presence of evil. It is our best ally, our justification for believing them wrong and foolish. From this it is but a short step towards recognizing that our grappling with evil both inside and around us subtilizes our characters, makes them more interesting; and we cannot but take some satisfaction in anything which achieves so worthwhile an end. Evil is therefore, surprisingly, the mother of humility and compassion. Virtue then appears as the reconciliation of the mighty opposities of good and evil; hence the vulnerability of all virtuous men and the truth in the observation that men of the greatest spirituality are capable of the greatest evil. A further reason for the impossibility of eliminating evil is that we all enjoy the spectacle of the catch-as-catch-can struggle between the two principles. Without that spectacle life would appear intolerably tedious. The angels in heaven revolted against God not out of pride, but out of boredom. More truthfully, I suspect God himself engineered, like a modern shrewd dictator, the unsuccessful revolt, for his wondrous creation had turned into a vast yawn insupportable to himself. It is this strategem, beyond all else, which proved his omnipotence and wisdom.

I now come, finally, to the status of evil in the present century. This is a complex question and beset with many subtle difficulties. However, with courage and holding one's nose as we descend from landing to landing, one can make one's way and arrive at some very interesting doors. The first thing to be noted is that the exceptionally heinous nature of 20th century evil and its immediate report in every corner of the world provides each of us with the most dangerous pretext for the commission of our own misdeeds. We have merely to say to ourselves, "I have never been a guard at Belsen, or pulled a lever at Auschwitz" to make our consciences feel that they have greater, more outrageous things to concern themselves with than our petty triumphs of revenge and injury. No crime that we commit, no breach of faith, no display of ingratitude can ever equal
the horrendous atrocities that were done within recent memory. This is our excuse—a handy and poisonous one. This may explain why the revelation of the Nazi gas chambers and Russian slave camps have nowhere produced the effects that tender-minded idealists expected from them. To most people not directly concerned with the events that transpired in them they provided a subtle kind of pleasure—that of self-exculpation—which they guiltily hastened to conceal even from themselves. This is the unmentionable stink in the soul of all men and women living today. Who can release us from the intolerable shame which this self-knowledge evokes in us? The knowledge of the infinite is a constant reproach to our finiteness. With Belsen and Auschwitz man touched the infiniteness of evil—and survived! At the bottom of his soul he cannot but be pleased with the outcome, and with the entire titanic drama which led up to it. He had extended his being into realms of evil no one before him had ever dared to, and though he looks at his moral scars furtively it is not without a secret pride and exultation. I know of no poet or novelist who has dared to look this evil in the face and tell mankind about it. And no doubt it is difficult to do so without feeling the ground slipping away from under one and without becoming enmeshed in a whole series of sinister thoughts and feelings only the strongest could experience without a corruption of the spirit. I shall now pass over hastily man’s peculiar need of punishment, or of a scapegoat; his secret wish to be degraded as a relief from the burden of virtue. As society grows more complex and its demands more encompassing, so does the weight of social guilt which oppresses us, that nameless feeling of wrongdoing, that vague sense of unworthiness from which the middle-aged find relief in alcoholism or spirituality. One reason we hate the virtuous is that they appear to be free of the burden of anxious guilt which presses down so heavily on the rest of us. We feel we are carrying his burden as well as our own and we resent his seeming refusal to go down into the loathsome abysses where we grimace at our own shadows. It is as though we were doing his work for him, and ironically we are aggrieved and angry at the injustice of this. But these are comparatively minor cracks in the twentieth century psyche. The really novel and startling thing is the existence in each of us of what I shall call the ‘Rudin Complex’ after the hero of Turgenev’s novel. It will be recalled by readers of that novel that Rudin, after revealing shameful weaknesses of character, in self-disgust dies fighting on the barricades for a cause he does not believe in. The crucifixion of scapegoats forbidden by wise and humane laws, the men and women of this century and of future centuries will increasingly exculpate their necessary daily evil by postulating and fantasizing some noble end for themselves. It is as if they said to themselves: "What does it matter how wicked I am so long as I die heroically (Hitler’s Gotterdammerung?). Everyone will then see how I
was misjudged and what a splendid fellow I was after all."
The outbreaks of insurrectionary and civil wars, of mob
violence in one form or another, perhaps the outbreak of
both World Wars—may they not be due to the obscure
promptings of the 'Rudin Complex'? Moreover, one must ask
oneself seriously what will happen to the world once peace,
domestic and international, is universally established and
the occasions for satisfying this subtle need, this
peculiarly civilized hunger of the soul is rigorously
frustrated. Can we not see the birth of a new, a more self-
destructive kind of anxiety, of Angst? Indeed, do not the
more observant among us already see the approaching shadows
of this anxiety on the drawn and harassed faces of the men
and women of this epoch.

- 6 -

God is dead, proclaimed Nietzsche in the nineteenth century.
In our own it is necessary to proclaim, "Morality is dead!"
The whole subject of ethics today is one that causes
infinite boredom. Semanticists may still poke their curious
fingers between its skeletal ribs, but to the man-on-the-
street nothing appears to him quite so futile as a
discussion on right and wrong. Intuitively he is aware that
the moralists and rationalists are deluded. Belsen and
Vorkuta came at the end of two thousand years of
Christianity. All great movements in history are
accompanied by violence and evil. The rain of atomic death
—if a third World War does break out—will fall on the just
and unjust alike. Nevertheless, it is not these
considerations, nor even those popular bugbears of the
moralists, historical relativism or psychoanalysis, which
have ended all discussion of good and evil. Civilization
has come of age. A proud man, today and in the future, will
be embarrassed at being praised for his virtues. For the
lesser breeds, the state will provide them with a set of
values along with their social insurance cards. Not moral
strength, but unexhausting pleasures, will be the search of
future man. In our very bones we know that mankind shall
never again see a Luther, or a Cromwell, a Lenin or a
Lincoln—not even a William Ewart Gladstone! The
Benthamites were not so wrong after all. Our morality is
daily becoming a simple arithmetic of pains and pleasures,
of losses and gains. For this reason we can already see
manifested on all sides an impatience with "goodness" and
"good men", for one senses that they are archaic survivals
of a passing age. We are impatient for their departure and
somewhat contemptuous of them for wishing to linger on. The
whole of North America, where morality is still discussed in
homes and universities, and Christianity taken seriously, is
a vast moral archaism, and the grave message-bringing
novelists among them [are] troglodytes for the amusement of
the enlightened European tourists to whom their
'spiritualizings' and moral stances are touching reminders of an age they have left behind on the other side of Belsen.

That great poetry transcends men's conceptions of good and evil is known to all really profound students of Shakespeare and Blake. All great poetry, including that of <i>Murdering Heights</i>, is forever incomprehensible to the moralist and rationalist, those quaint 18th century types that have somehow survived into our own. Their wisdom, alas, is not so much refuted as ignored, for that is the usual manner in which history dismisses insights which have become irrelevancies. Nowadays the novel and the tale can be taken seriously only by the second class citizens of literature. And by the reviewers of the large newspapers who have not yet heard the news that morality is dead. These still prate for the edification of their mass publics of <i>spiritual insights, moral dramas, etc, etc</i>. Obviously, all this is a means for still investing one's air-conditioned, frozen-foods life with some significance and colour. Just as one can with every assurance of being right assert that we shall never again see the birth and spread of a new religion, so with equal assurance can we say that the novel, and perhaps the drama as well, have as serious art forms had their day. As entertainment they will still continue to enjoy a certain vogue, but I cannot imagine any first-rate mind or creative talent expressing itself through these forms. The disappearance of the tragic sense has blighted them forever. So has the reduction of the individual to a cipher, a chance statistic in a governmental bureau. Mr P. Chayeffsky has pointed the way. An over-shy butcher finds it difficult to court a female; in short, to marry and breed other butchers. Let us take out our handkerchiefs and dab our tear-filled eyes at this harrowing tragedy. Along with the documentary, this slice-of-life realism is the art of the future appropriately seasoned with moral reflections for the more 'sensitive' and 'cultured' on the triumphant nature of the spirit. But this is all to the good for the truly creative spirits who see beyond these 'moral melodrammers for the mediocre'. Only those arts uninfected with morality will continue to exist: music, sculpture, painting, and poetry. The first three have already freed themselves, poetry alone must still battle for its liberty. Much of our poetry is too gross for future consumption, suffering from its identification with the 'Good' as once with those other Socratic monstrosities of Beauty and Truth. If there is a poetry in the future it will be <i>free</i> in a sense undreamed of by the practitioners of the art in the first two decades of the present century. It will be a poetry that will again sing of the great antinomies in the universe—and in the soul of man. It will be Nietzschean—that is, Christian—for both Nietzsche and Christ affirmed the abundant life beyond the Law.
The task of the poet today is especially difficult. He lives in a time before the overthrow of Law, of Morality. Indeed, because of recent events, there is more talk of "morality", "spirit", etc, than at any time before. The pressure to join in this well-intentioned, but meaningless, chatter is tremendous. He must steel himself to keep aloof from it--it is his task to save the bitter, inconsolable things. He must be on guard against the seduction of the normal ties of family, friends, community service, etc. At once, his despair and glory, an obscure instinct will lead him to break one tie after another.

242.[marginalia] April 8, 1959
Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of April 5 and the enclosed essay on evil.

I am delighted to hear that you like my Lampman article. Occasionally I have flashes of insight, & I think that "Heat" business was one of them. There are a few other such scattered through Ten Canadian Poets to which no reviewer has yet done justice, but I am optimistic enough to believe that they will be recognized in time. If 10 Can P isn't the most substantial & penetrating book of criticism of Canadian poetry ever published, I'll eat my shirt. (Buy me a silk one, will you--it would be more slithery in the throat than cotton!)

Well, you see that having eaten humble pie in my last letter I am now going on to a richer diet.

While I think of it, I must tell you a lovely true (?) story told me last night at the UNB Athletic Banquet by the elderly (but hearty & amusing Wife of Bath type) matron of the men's residences. It seems that when their late Majesties George VI & Elizabeth visited Newfoundland in 1939, the oldest living inhabitant, an old lady of 107, was given the privilege of meeting them. After she had had her royal interview she was questioned by reporters.

"Are you able to read, Mrs ___?"
"Oh yes, I can read without glasses."
"And you still get around a good deal?"
"Oh yes, I don't even need a stick."
"And you enjoy good health?"
"Oh yes, I'm in better shape now than I was twenty years ago."
"And have you ever been bed-ridden?"
"Huh! Thousands of times--and three times in a dory!"

I've read your essay on evil a couple of times but I'm not yet ready to discuss it in any detail. Many things in it I like, such as your definition of evil, & epigrams such as "If I tell a man he is honourable, I have made him my prisoner." On the other hand, I don't agree that "all
goodness because it is conventional & predictable is limiting"—what about our late professor of physics (Frank Scott wrote a bad poem about him)\(^1\) who jumped from the railroad bridge to save a boy from drowning, or the old man in my "Lost Girl" story who succoured the little girl? And I think you are away off base about the novel being finished—I know it is in a slump at the moment, but it will come back.

I want in this letter, however, to speak rather of your "Moth" poem. I still like the poem very much, but there are some things about it I want to question.

In the first stanza I prefer "run" to "swim" for minnows—of course we know that they ordinarily swim rather than run, but still one does use run loosely for "flee" & I'd prefer to keep run for the rhyme. But (& forgive me for mentioning syntax again) what is the syntax here—oh yes, the blind minnows are governed by "I Know"—OK.

Second stanza—good.

Third stanza—why would Urizen lug you out? Isn't Urizen the conventional God of custom & authority?\(^2\) I don't profess to be an authority on Blake, but that is my understanding.

Fourth stanza—very good!

Fifth—why would minnows be on Pan's brow?

Sixth—flat first line, too explicit.

Seventh—I don't care for either version of the second line.

Eighth—I prefer the revised version—good.

Ninth—I rather like this & can't see why you dropped added it to the revised version.[Got mixed up here between the versions.]

Tenth—Mary liked the original last line very much; I wasn't so keen, but I'm even less keen about the revised version. That's a horribly flat, prosaic last line for such an excellent poem. I feel sure you'll think of something better.\(^3\)

Now in this poem you've really got something.

I shall be looking forward to hearing from you about my humble pie letter—please understand that I painted a true but one-sided picture. I bounce back very quickly from such moods of self-deprecation, & please don't imagine that I spend much time wallowing in self-pity.

Love & kisses,

Des P


\(^2\)"The new thundergod of moral law and tyrannical power, whom Blake calls Urizen, was a projection of the death-impulse." Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 129.

\(^3\)In the first version of "I Know the Dark and Hovering Moth" which Layton sent Pacey the final line is "Glow like a fiery genital." In the further revised version Layton sent Pacey, the final line reads "The sun between them like a pendant ball!" In the revised and marginalised
version Layton was soon to send Pacey (as in the published version), the final line reads "The
globed sun enclose like a genital."

243.[tg] April 8, 1959
Dear Desmond Pacey:
You’re a great and good man stop the best stop and I’m
your devoted friend for life stop hugs and kisses.
Irving

244.[ts]1 Department of English
The University of New Brunswick
Fredericton, NB
Irving Layton, Esq
3360 Ridgewood
Montreal, PQ
April 11, 1959
Dear Irving,
Mr David McCord, this year’s Founders’ Day
speaker, has donated his travelling expenses, in the sum of
seventy-five dollars, to the university, and has suggested
that the sum be used to perpetuate the name of Charles
Roberts in some way. The president and I have decided to
establish the Charles G.D. Roberts Prize for the best short
story written each year by an undergraduate. We should like
to build up the fund, and already Dean Bailey has agreed to
match McCord’s contribution. If you would like to
contribute to the fund, or can suggest people who might be
willing to do so, I shall be glad to hear from you.
Yours sincerely
Des Pacey

PS[ms]: What a wonderful telegram! Looking for a letter to
explain it! DP

1This is a form letter with the postscript inserted by hand.

245. April 14, 1959
Dear Desmond,
This is not a reply to your two letters, just an
interim note so that you won’t think I’ve died. I usually
put aside Sat morning to write you, but this Saturday I was
too euphoric over the announcement I’d won a CC Senior
Fellowship.1 I couldn’t sit still; to hold a pen in my hand
was impossible. Leonard Cohen also won a Junior
Fellowship,2 and he was over one night last week for mutual
congratulations and a celebration. We’re planning another
one for this week.
Your supporting letter must have been a decisive factor
in the Council’s decision to grant me the Fellowship. I’m
very grateful to you, Desmond. What’s more I’m going to
show it in other ways than showering you with invective and
abuse. I hope by now you’ve forgiven my obnoxious display of arrogance and vanity. Your first letter was one of the most moving things I have ever read and when I put it down I had tears. I had guessed from your short stories that your childhood was no happier than my own, but I had no idea it was as dismal as that. In many ways it was worse than my own for I knew only searing poverty, not the kind of shunting from one place to another that you describe. True, I had a mother who compulsively cursed me from the moment I opened my eyes in the morning till I closed them again when I went to sleep, but at least I knew where the curses were coming from. My troubles, however, began in my adolescence when I broke with my family’s religious orthodoxy and the narrowness that goes with it. I had to find out everything for myself, and I was badly equipped to do so, for by temperament I was a dreamer and a sentimentalist. I spent every penny I could beg, borrow or steal on books—to the dismay of my family who wished me to think of business or a trade. Any number of times, my older sister would rush to my bookshelves and scatter my precious books in a heap on the floor. To my family I was a scandalous loafer who would come to no good end. I had to fight every one of them: I had to fight their ignorance, conservatism, their petty-bourgeois outlook that looked so frighteningly wise at the time. The young are so easily fooled. Adults look so impressive to them. It’s taken me half a lifetime to see through the cant and hokum by which the world is humbugged, and if there’s one lesson I’ve learned it’s that life is a constant battle to keep one’s lines of communication with infinity from being cut. You’ve probably noticed how frequently I use the word “gelding” or “castrato” in my poems. Well, that’s my way of expressing my anger with all those who I feel have let the bright flame die inside them. Sex, religion, society, the family—they can be terrible traps—or glorious avenues to personal fulfillment.

Of course you’re much too hard on yourself. You are one of the most forthright men I know. I admire your courage and honesty. I also admire your craft and sensitivity both as a short story writer and a critic, and wish, though I know the wish is a hopeless one, I was your equal there. I’m not saying all this to boost your ego, but to record my own sincere opinion.

It’s almost one o’clock am and I must get some sleep. Your criticisms—most of them—are well taken. I’ll send you a revised version of the poem this coming Saturday.

Love to Mary.

With love,
Irving

1 Layton was awarded a Canada Council Senior Fellowship 1960-61 to travel and write for a year in Europe.

2 Leonard Cohen was awarded a Canada Council Junior Fellowship for the year 1960-61.
Dear Irving,

Your letter dated the 14th (can that be right?) arrived this morning. I hasten to congratulate you most heartily on the Canada Council Senior Fellowship. I am delighted, and hope that it will enable you to write something really terrific. Wish I could have been at the party of celebration with you & Leonard Cohen.

All your comments about my second last letter—the mournful autobiography—are far too kind. I suppose it does one some good once in a long time to indulge in that kind of self-pitying survey, but I'm sure it would be most unhealthy to do it often. I really have been terribly lucky and I have only my own laziness to blame for not being a better writer than I am. Anyway, it was awfully good of you to say those kind words about my criticism & short stories. I do need encouragement at the moment—it seems to be Frye, Frye, Frye all the way these days, and I sometimes wonder whether it is worth going on with criticism. Ten Canadian Poets got so little recognition for all the work I put into it—not a single review that seemed to recognize at all fully what I was trying to do.

However I am lapsing again into self-pity, and my mask of "the bitter and the gay" is slipping! I think the point about wearing a mask is that it does gradually mould your face.

Yesterday was Mary's birthday, so I mixed up some martinis & then took her out to a roadhouse five miles downriver for a steak dinner. Afterwards we went to a concert by the Fredericton Civic Orchestra, & finally home for gin & orange—a very delightful evening.

Have you heard of the new magazine Canadian Literature that is being launched at UBC next fall? It is to be edited by George Woodcock, who has invited me to contribute an article to the first number. I have suggested a biography of Major John Richardson—I have accumulated a lot of hitherto unpublished letters & documents by & about him & could do something quite lively I think. I am not sure that we are really ready yet for such a magazine, but it will be fun to see how it develops. I hope they will publish stories & poems as well as critical articles, but I'm not sure what their policy is in that regard.

Did I tell you that Mary has been painting a portrait of me for the last two weeks, off & on? I am sitting at my desk writing—I wanted it that way so that I work while posing. It is finished now, and she has done a splendid job. She is going to frame it & present it to me for my birthday on May 1. She has worked out a most interesting composition, and a nice colour harmony of blues & browns. It's an amazingly good likeness—several times the kids have taken the portrait for me!
I shall be looking forward to the revised version of your poem. And what about that short story you’ve been working on? I’ve never got around to writing the two new short stories I have ideas for & I’m still trying to work them out in my head. Once exams are over—they start at the end of next week—I hope to get a lot of writing done, but from now until mid-May I shall be terribly busy with all the end of term rush.

Give my congratulations & best wishes to Leonard Cohen when you see him—and accept yourself my love & most heartfelt felicitations.

As ever,

Des P

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1Canadian Literature: a Quarterly of Criticism and Review was founded by Earle Birney, Roy Daniells and George Woodcock, its first and longtime editor (W.H. New took over the editorship with number 74, Autumn 1977), at the University of British Columbia in the summer of 1959; it continues in 1994.


3Major John Richardson (1796-1852), soldier, novelist, veteran of the War of 1812, author of Wacousta: or, the Prophecy (1832).

April 22, 1959

Dear Desmond,

Something came up over the week-end, so I wasn’t able to write you. Now it’s Wednesday, and I’m on my Passover holidays—now it’s my turn to watch with a secret pleasure my teaching friends go off to work, for they had their holidays during Easter when my school didn’t get any. I’ve got twelve whole days in which to do nothing but loaf and "invite my soul." Fortunately, I began a poem this Sunday, so I have my work cut out for me.

Last night I was over to Côte St. Luc, trying to persuade Betty to let me take an apartment on Westminster, not too far from my former home, so that I’d be able to see the children more often than I now can. She wouldn’t hear of it, however. Well, I put Sissyboo to bed with a story I created as I went along, something about a poor slum girl who fell in love with a pin that turned back into a prince whom she afterwards married, though I gave the story a modern, proletarian twist by having the prince renounce his former easy life and become a train engineer. Sissyboo is growing into a beautiful, talented person with very taking airs. I’m vastly proud of her. Max turned thirteen on the 7th of this month—had his father been an orthodox Jew he should have had his Bar Mitzvah with all the emotional trimmings and fuss that go along with the event. Instead I bought him a guitar he very much wanted, and now he’s taking lessons in guitar and piano. He’s a very promising boy, with a wonderful flair for writing. His compositions for
school are tops and he brings home the most flattering comments from his teacher. I’ve great hopes for him. He’s a handsome devil and not a streak of malice in him. After I had put Sissyboo to sleep, I came downstairs and told Max stories about Tom Paine and Shelley. The world is beginning to open for him.

McClelland & Stewart mailed me a copy of A Red Carpet for the Sun that was complete except for the cover which they had sent me earlier. It’s going to be a fine-looking book. The poems are individually numbered which gives them an additional impressiveness somehow, and the type is a clear and bold one. On a re-reading, after a lapse of several months, the preface I wrote for the collection still pleases me. I do, however, have some heartburning over the omission of several poems. I left them out through the falsest sense of economy—the wish to save the publishers some money! Now I can kick myself. Poems like "Community", "Karl Marx", "The Eagle" (Lenin), "Afternoon of a Coupon Clipper", "Training Camp", "Ville Marie", "Stolen Watch", "Suum Cuique", "Schoolteacher in Late November", "Elan"—all from The Black Huntsmen. And one or two other poems from The Long Peashooter. MC & S—or their reader—asked me to leave out "Olives for Jay Macpherson". I agreed to do so, but in any second edition of the book in it goes. That was the only poem exception was taken to. In a second edition, I would not only include the omitted ones I mentioned above, but also "North Country", "Sudden Thaw", "Nightfall", "To Be Played on a Broken Virginal", and possibly "Existentialist" and "Mrs Potiphar". For good or for ill, no one is writing that kind of poetry anymore—not even I. They’ve got a toughness and a verve that belonged to those years. I hope the edition sells out quickly (5,000) so that I can put them in, along with the new things I’ve recently done and the things I expect to do in the future.

Dial in this Friday night to Anthology. Macpherson, Woodcock and I discuss MacLennan’s latest. It was an inter-city hook-up—Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver—a modern marvel and a damned interesting experience for me. I enjoyed myself thoroughly. Did you read M’s novel? Let me know what you think of it. My own opinions you’ll hear this Friday if you tune in.

I’m enclosing a cheque for $10.00 towards the short story fund. It’s the best I can do at the moment. And the revised version of the poem I sent you earlier. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

enclosure: ts "The Caged Bird" and revised "I Know the Dark and Hovering Moth" with marginalia:

I KNOW THE DARK AND HOVERING MOTH
(For William Blake)
For vilest emissary of death
I know the dark and hovering moth "Swim" is more
Whose furred wings overwhelm the sun;
And the blind minnows that cannot swim.

O a fat black moth was my first wife;
She sat her weight on my greenest leaf.
Another moth was so fair a prize,
Melted my manhood in her eyes.

William Blake spied the vanishing heel,
Made all the white stars in heaven reel.
I heard his wild, dismayed shout.
Rib by rib Urizen lugged me out.

Now at early dawn, my heart with joy
Like any carefree holiday boy
I look at the minnows in the pond
And catch and kill them: they make no sound.

Lovely Aviva, shall we crush moths?
Geldings stone till we’re out of breath?
Wipe the minnows from the goat-god’s brow?
He hears their screams; he rejoices now.

For sun throbs with sexual energy;
The meadows bathe in it, each tall tree.
The sweet dark graves give up their dead.
Love buries the stale fish in their stead.

From crows we’ll make a cunning leaven;
From harsh nettles: lock them in a poem.
The virtuous reading it at once
Will change into rimed and sapless stumps.

My proud Love we’ll water them, embrace
Over their unleaving wretchedness:
Till snakes cavort in gardens and sing
Melic praises for each mortal thing;

And from Lethean pond beneath a scarp
There rush the vigorous hunting carp
At whose gorping jaws and obscene mouths
Flit the vulnerable black-winged moths;

Poets, each the resurrected Christ,
Move like red butterflies through the mist
I’ve tried to
To where the shafts, the sloping shafts of Hell, indicate
The globed sun enclose like a genital.

The marriage of Heaven and Hell, the
recovery of innocence, and
Blake’s Hermaphrodite by
means of the sexual image in
the final two lines.
The sloping shafts of Hell can be visualized as the giant thighs and the globed sun as the creative testicle of Heaven.  

Irving Layton


2 A second printing of *A Red Carpet* appeared in 1960, but there was no second edition.

3 *Anthology*, CBC Radio, 24 April 1959.
April 28, 1959

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your two letters—the one commenting on Intervales¹ and the other of April 22—and the two poems. It was very good of you to comment in so detailed a fashion on the students’ work. I have shown your comments to most of them, and they were very flattered to find you taking such an interest in them. I think you are quite correct in saying that the prose is better than the poetry. Most of the prose came out of my Creative Writing course, in which I do not (for obvious reasons) attempt to teach poetry at all. Quite apart from any help they may have received from my course, I think it is a fact that the prose-writers on the campus at the moment are rather better than the poets.

I hope you are enjoying your Passover holiday. So far you have produced one good poem, and I hope that there will be others—and what about the short story?

It’s too bad Betty won’t hear of your living in the neighbourhood so that you can see your children more readily. You obviously enjoy the company of your children very much, and I am sure they enjoy yours. Is Betty doing any painting? Is she reasonably contented?

I had a notice from McClelland & Stewart the other day mentioning your new book. In that paper-covered format it ought to sell very well. I’m sure that’s going to be the trend more & more in publishing. If Ryerson had brought out The Picnic in a cheaper format the sales would have been much better—$3.95 is altogether too much to pay for a book of short stories.

By the way, The Picnic continues to receive critical acclaim. I had a note from Carl Klinck² of Western the other day saying he had read it with great pleasure & that he considered me the Canadian Chekhov. Of course that’s rot, but a little flattery won’t hurt me. Then yesterday morning Douglas Lochhead of Dalhousie reviewed it over the CBC from Halifax and said it was one of the most important works of fiction to appear in Canada in a decade!³ I also had a note from Weaver⁴ saying he liked it & hoped to have it reviewed on Critically Speaking soon.⁵ So it’s earning me some kudos if very little cash!

Mary & I listened to you on Anthology. Neither of us has yet read the MacLennan novel—Mary is giving it to me for my birthday this Friday—so the discussion didn’t mean as much to us as it might have done. I must say I thought the discussion was pretty dull, with the exception of some of your comments. Woodcock & McPherson sounded as if they were both under heavy sedation or else in an alcoholic stupor, and only you sounded as if literature were really a live issue. I have a feeling that I’m not going to enjoy the novel, but I’ll try to read it over this weekend & let you know later what I think.
At the moment I'm reading John Braine's *Room at the Top* (Penguin Books) & enjoying it very much. It's as readable as Kerouac. I also recently completed William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. I think these three, together with Salinger, prove that the novel is far from dead, & that indeed it is entering a new creative era.

Thanks very much for the $10 for the Roberts Prize Fund. It was very generous of you to contribute at all. The fund is slowly accumulating, and I think there is no doubt that we shall be able to offer a prize of $100 a year for five or six years at least. No knowing what New Brunswick Chekov we may produce!

I think the Moth poem is now just about perfect. It's a strong, splendid poem.

I'm not so sure about "The Caged Bird". Am I right in thinking that you are seeking to make much the same point as Lampman's "Heat"—namely, the reconciliation of opposites?

I haven't had time to read the poem more than two or three times--I'm in the thick of marking exams, judging prize essays, holding final committee meetings etc--so I'm really not ready to give a definitive opinion on it.

When will you have some leisure? I've been thinking of having another go at my novel, which I wrote ten years ago & then shelved. I'd like you to read it & tell me frankly whether it's worth revising & how. Will you ever have time for that?

After a winter of merely drawing, Mary is again in a painting phase. She did a very good portrait of me, & has just completed a truly magnificent study of our youngest child, Penny. She has caught all the paradoxical innocence & mischief, fragility & toughness, of a 4 yr old girl, & she has a lovely composition too.

Well, we must start another argument. We have the most fun when we're fighting, don't we? Having just learned today of a $1600 salary boost for next year (that's a boost of $3000 in two years!) I don't feel in a very pugnacious mood.

Didn't you like my Newfoundland story? Love & kisses,
Des P

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1Pugitive.

2Carl Klinck, letter to Desmond Pacey, 20 April 1959, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.


4Robert Weaver, letter to Desmond Pacey, 17 April 1959, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

5Sally Creighton, rev. of The Picnic by Desmond Pacey, Critically Speaking CBC Radio, 14 June 1959.
Dear Desmond,

Did you see the poem, "Because My Calling Is Such" in the QQ? It looks good. Despite your repeated assertions and innuendoes, I think your prick is dripping—that’s a great lyric! May I never write a worse one as long as I live and I’m humble enough not to ask for more talent to write a better one. Any day I expect to receive a letter from you telling me you’ve at last seen the light. My place is the Friendly Mission. All repentant sinners welcome.

Love to Mary. I shall write you this Saturday.

Luff,
Irving

closure: "The Wolfgang Russ" (revision of "The Caged Bird" with extensive marginalia):

THE WOLFGANG RUSE

Russ—German for chimney. Everything goes up in smoke; the opposition of German and Slav (Russ: Russian); the opposition of German and Hebrew. Paradoxically, the caged bird carols.

There lies the ship, the Wolfgang Russ. After the Trojan War, Ulysses With his young and fast brother on deck Impelled her out of flaming Lubeck. All's changed. The Krauts are blond and phallic; This day, bland as a Dutchman. I look Indifferently at the trim boatswain, His scrubbed elliptical head too clean For a man; and at the officer Haunched hermaphroditic before The caged bird caroling; smile, again Take in the ship's Heraclitean name. In the sunlight brilliant are the floes Shuttling past in their icy furrows Like white ducks in a shoot gallery. The Kraut officer, rising, sights me; Salutes across the forbidding rail. With an old confounding ritual We turn out our pockets full of change And loose tears. I stare at the wide range. And freely the river seems to run
O endless madcap exultation!
So, the sky and its reddening bergs
Moving eastward, moving more slowly.
Beyond abodes that rot, the glory
The bridal lock of water and sky
Where chime the friendly oppositions
That shred us like knives, smiling; in plains
Leaving white nests of untroubled skulls
Spoiling under the sun where chance flung,
their joy like that of the wheeling gulls
*Mindless: hear the bird’s fierce caroling.

*ambiguity. The joy in living is irrational and inexplicable. Who knows why life tastes so sweet?

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250. May 8, 1959
Dear Irving,
A short & hurried note to thank you for your poem & note of recent date.
I did see your "Because My Calling is Such" in QQ, & I must admit it looks good. I wouldn’t say it’s your best, but it is a good poem.
I must try & send you a copy of a most perceptive review of the Picnic which came over the CBC recently.¹
The Roberts Prize Fund is growing by leaps & bounds--up to $610 already!
Will write more fully when the rush is over.

Love,
Des P

¹See 248.3.

251. May 11, 1959
Dear Desmond,
Many thanks for your note which came today. I’m glad you feel differently about "Because My Calling Is Such". It’s not the best poem I’ve ever written--I never claimed it
was—but it’s a good poem and many people have praised it for those qualities that I tried to put into it. As you know I’m a hard man to satisfy, and even the shortest lyric goes through several revisions before I’ll say or think it’s good.

I hope you like the lyric on the other side of the page. I put the finishing(?) touches to it this morning. It came out of a party I attended with Aviva on Saturday night where I was attacked on all sides by hungry philistines coming in (so they thought!!) for the kill. I held them at bay for 4 solid hours and my host and hostess were delighted at the success of their party. I should add they live in Westmount and their friends and acquaintances felt they had many old scores, and some new ones, to settle with me. Do you know M. Cohen? He’s a colleague of F.R. Scott’s at the Faculty of Law, and he was certainly the brightest of my antagonists. We were arguing who did more for 19th C reform, the pol scientists and statesmen, or the poets, and he thought to clinch the argument by saying Bentham had improved the penal system in England.

Me: That’s just the difference between your boys and mine. Yours wanted to reform the prisons, but Blake and Shelley wanted to abolish them. He had no comeback to that.

There’s a nice letter from Eli Mandel. He’s also gotten a Senior Fellowship from the CC and he wants to spend a part of it on a book of poems brought out by Contact Press. Very likely we’ll do it for him. His poems are too cerebral for my total liking, but he’s got talent & persistence. He’s written a review of A Laughter in the Mind which will appear in the June issue of DR.

You mention a short story of yours and ask my opinion of it. I never received it. Love to Mary.

Hugs,

Irv

PS Many heartfelt thanks for your detailed criticism of "The Dark & Hovering Moth". Much appreciated.

enclosure: ts "Trilliums After a Party"

1Irving Layton, "Trilliums after a Party," The Swinging Flesh 155.

2Maxwell Cohen (b. 1910), lawyer, Professor of Law at McGill; he served as chairman of five Royal Commissions and as Canadian representative to the United Nations.

3Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), British philosopher, economist, father of philosophic radicalism and pioneer of prison reform; his scheme for a model prison named the "Panopticon" has been influential.

4Eli Mandel, letter to Irving Layton, 6 May 1959, Layton Collection, Concordia University.

5Mandel, Fuseli Poems (Toronto, Contact, 1960).

Dear Desmond,

Surprised I haven’t heard from you all this time. I sent you a letter and a new poem more than a week ago. Things don’t seem right in God’s world when I don’t hear from you for that length of time.

Gustafson was in town a few days ago. We met at the Sheraton, and Louis & his wife as well as Ron Everson were there. We had a lively evening talking about poetry and assorted meshuggimah (Yiddish for crazy) poets. He’s picked up a CC grant for a safari thro’ the wilds of Canada. He was in town to record an ½-hr talk on Cndn poetry for the CBC.

All is well here. Glad my vacation is approaching. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Oiving

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1Gustafson was awarded a Canada Council Senior Fellowship in 1959 to support his travels across Canada.


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Dear Irving,

Thank you for your postcard of May 28. You seem to have been under the impression that I owed you a letter; I had the opposite impression. I know I had a note from you & a new short poem; but did I not send you a note & a copy of Lochhead’s review of The Picnic after that? Anyway, I have been wondering why I did not hear from you, & you have been wondering why you did not hear from me. I’m glad you acted!

I have been very busy. The week of May 9 to 16 was the week of our graduation exercises, and that is always hectic, with several meetings every day & dinners, dances etc every night. Once that is over, I usually relax for a week or two, but this year one of my graduate students has a grant from the Canada Council to act as my research assistant on The Literary History of Canada, and as there is so much research to be done & his time is limited, I felt I had to get right to work with him. We have been working in the library every day from nine to six, going through bibliographies and magazines looking for short stories, reviews of novels, & critical material generally. I have been going through the Canadian Forum for the years 1927 to 1934 so far, page by page, and have been truly amazed by the quality of the short stories. Do you know that at that period O’Brien (of Best Short Stories of 1929, 1930 etc)
rated the CE, Story, and one other American mag whose title I forget as the best magazines for short stories on the continent--well ahead of Scribner's, Atlantic Monthly, transition, This Quarterly, etc?

Well, that's how my days have been spent. In the evenings I have been busy on another project. George Woodcock, the editor of the new Canadian Literature mag at UBC, asked me for a 5,000 word article for the first issue of his magazine. I decided to do a biography of the first Canadian novelist, Major John Richardson, using the new documents (his marriage certificate, various letters, petitions, etc) I have turned up at intervals over the last ten years. Well, I finished the article last night—but instead of 5000 words it is 10,000 words—about 34 pages long. I’ll send it to Woodcock anyway & see whether he can use it in two parts, or whether he insists on it being cut down.

I have also been involved in a couple of speaking engagements. In Saint John a week ago last Thursday night I addressed the annual banquet of the Saint John County Teacher's Association on "New Developments in Canadian Literature." I discussed the more recent outstanding books of poetry, fiction, & non-fictional prose, and of course talked of you & your work among other things. Which reminds me that I promised to tell you what I thought of MacLennan's novel (which was another of the things I discussed in my talk). Well, I found it very disappointing—altogether too bland, too suave, too unreal. The only authenticity is in the portrait of the male hero, obviously MacLennan himself, and he comes out as pretty much of a prig. But Martell, & Catherine, and the others have no reality in them at all, and I couldn’t feel that the picture of the thirties had any of the real blood & guts of the period in it at all.

Then this past Thursday afternoon I addressed 350 women in the heat on "Writing in New Brunswick". They were the members of the Provincial Convention of the Women’s Institutes, most of them from little towns & villages, and I urged them to support regional libraries, to form book clubs etc in order to increase the amount of reading in the province.

I also have been writing (so far only in my head) a new short story. I hope to get it on paper either today or tomorrow evening.

And I have also sent out more letters asking for donations for the Roberts Prize fund. Ryerson Press sent $100, & the Macmillan Co $150—but your damn no-good Jack McClelland sent nothing! Anyway, I’ve got the fund up to $840 now, so it’s coming along very well.

I should have gone to Saskatoon today to attend the Royal Society, but felt I had to stay here to get on with my work.

And I’ve been thinking of the future & have tentatively decided to apply for a Canada Council fellowship to go to England (Cambridge) for 1960-61. After twenty continuous
years of teaching, winter & summer, I think I need a change & a rest.

Mary sends her love.

Love & kisses, 
Des Pacey

PS Try & listen on June 14 when The Picnic is to be reviewed on Critically Speaking.9 DP

PPS What did you think of Louis’ review in the CF?10 DP

1If Pacey did send this note, it is now fugitive.

2John Ripley, see 448.4.

3Edward O’Brien (1890-1941), American writer and editor, editor of The Best Short Stories (26 annual volumes; 1915-40) and The Best British Short Stories (19 annual volumes; 1921-40), author of The Advance of the American Short Story (1923).

4See 246.2.

5Hugh MacLennan, The Watch that Ends the Night (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958).

6"The Weasel," see 258.1.

7John Gordon ("Jack") McClelland (b. 1922), publisher who joined his father’s firm (McClelland and Stewart, 1906) after World War II (becoming president in 1961), and transformed it into Canada’s best-known publishing house.

8The 1959 annual meeting of the Royal Society of Canada was held 1-3 June at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon.

9Sally Creighton, rev. of The Picnic by Desmond Pacey, Critically Speaking, CBC Radio, 14 June 1959.

10Louis Dudek, rev. of The Picnic by Desmond Pacey Canadian Forum May 1959: 45-46.

June 8, 1959

Dear Desmond,

You certainly seem to have been on the go! Speeches, graduation parties, 10,000 word articles—what’s the name of the vitamin pills you’re swallowing? I’ve been active too, but not so hyperthyroidically as you have. I gave a poetry reading and lecture some weeks ago at the International Club—some 250 assorted Europeans listened to it.1 When I told them that the poetry centre of the world was no longer Paris, or London, or New York, but right here in Montreal they almost fell out of their seats. I tried to make the boast good by reading from the works of Dudek, Cohen, Scott and Layton; by the end of the evening, I may not have persuaded them to accept my radical observation, but I at least made them comprehend that some new and exciting work was being done here. That was not a small achievement. Europeans adopt the same attitude towards us that Englishmen once did to America—we’re good at making money and at
cheating while doing so, but as for Culture, we haven’t got any. I didn’t smash their armour-plated complacency, but I certainly dented it badly.

The review came, I believe, before I sent you "Trilliums After A Party". There was a full-page letter on the back of it. I forget now what I said there. Did I mention the review of The Picnic? I liked it because it said some deservedly fine things about your stories, but for that reason only. The comments themselves I considered superficial. I hope Frye does a better job, as I am sure he will. Your book should have been brought out as a paperback—it would have had a good sale and made your reputation as one of the best writers of short stories in this country. I’m eager to see more of your work. Let me see this new story you’re working on. My own is finished and I’m half done revising it, but I can’t get up enough interest to go on with it. I shall though for I’ve promised Shortliffe a story for his Fall number of QO. You mentioned a novel you had done some years ago. By all means send it along—I’ll be able to read it during the summer slack. That’s if, I don’t get all steamed up by a novel of my own or a great epic!

Yesterday afternoon Leonard Cohen and I dropped in on A.M. Klein. We found him in good spirits, though Leonard’s comment afterwards was that the fires had been banked. I thought him somewhat subdued, but I was glad to find him as responsive as I did, and still as sharply witty as ever. It takes him perhaps a little longer to unroll his punch, but the punch is still there. I did think he was glad to see us, and once when we were talking about Virgil I thought I saw the old Klein emerge. It was a very moving experience for my young friend, Leonard, who has written two very wonderful poems about Klein. There’s a talented fellow for you! Keep your eyes on him. This is a wonderful country to be alive and writing in, when almost each year brings a new and splendid crop of poets. I delight in Eli Mandel, Macpherson, Cohen, Hine who strike me as the most promising of the younger poets at the present time. But doubtless there are others. Mandel has sent us a mss which Contact will publish in the fall. He’s got an excellent book together. Really substantial work.

I’m glad your opinion of MacLennan’s book is the same as my own. In the face of the unanimous praise the novel received, I felt I was going out terribly far on a limb when I knocked it as I did. It’s great to have you on my side...Love to Mary.

Luff & kisses.
Irv

PS Didn’t you go to the Saskatoon conference? Wilson did, and several other critical luminaries. Wilson is editing a special poetry section for the summer issue of the QO. But I’ve probably told you about this before.
PPS LC is leaving the clothing business this Sept. Can’t take it anymore. Will try the CBC. His mother is in the Allen Memorial with a breakdown. My own mother died three weeks ago at the age of 89. I loved her deeply.

2Layton is referring to the Lochhead review of The Picnic (see 248.3).
3Frye did not review The Picnic; for the source of this misunderstanding, see 257.
4"Dislocation;" see 257.3.
6See 251.5.
8Marsha (Klinitsky Klein) Cohen Klein (1907-71).
9Keine Lazarovitch (1870-1959), died on 16 May 1959.

255. June 10, 1959

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of June 8.

I’ll run through your letter & comment on the points you raise. No, I didn’t go to Saskatoon, in spite of the fact that three separate organizations were ready to pay my fare. Those meetings get pretty tiring, & rather dull—especially after one has been to a number of them in a row. I have been to at least five in a row—in fact, six or seven—Edmonton last year, Ottawa the year before, Montreal (when you heard me read my paper to the Royal Society), Toronto, London. I didn’t feel like another trip away out west, I wanted to get some work done before Summer School starts on June 29, I was not, for once, either reading a paper or chairing a meeting—so I stayed home. I miss meeting Roy Daniells, but he’s about the only one of that gang I care for. Most of them are either pompous asses or else "career boys" out to catch some department head’s eye for an "offer" & a raise. The Royal Society was to me the greatest disappointment of all: I always thought with awe of that august body, imagining that if I ever were elected I should really be in company with the real brains. In fact, the fellows are only a little older & a little duller than the members of the junior societies. I don’t think you were terribly impressed by that afternoon session in which Frye, Daniells & I performed—but I can assure you that people still talk of that as the best Royal Society session they ever attended, & having attended a good many others I can quite believe them!
Who were the "critical luminaries" you spoke of as going? Frye & I weren't going--and what other critics are there?

So you've been blowing your own horn again, have you? Good! (I refer to the International Club speech.) You're almost as big an egotist as I am. But didn't you ever hear that Fredericton, not Montreal, is the Poet's Corner of Canada? It's officially recognized as such by the Historic Sites & Monuments Board of Canada, so there!

You seem to want to provoke me into saying something about "Trilliums after a Party". Well--you've asked for it. I didn't say anything before because the poem struck me as sheer tripe--an occasional jeu d'esprit which was fun to write, no doubt, but as poetry not worth a tinker's damn.

I don't know what review you are talking about as being superficial--Lochhead's, or Dudek's. I suppose you mean Lochhead's--if so, I agree. But I thought Louis' was quite a thoughtful & well-constructed review. What say you? (And don't forget Critically Speaking this Sunday at 4:30 for Sally Creighton on Picnic--though I expect a blast.) What makes you think Frye will be reviewing it? (Answer the question--so often you don't!)

My new story is being typed at the moment. I'll send it when it's done. You probably won't like it, but I think it's a miniature masterpiece, the best thing since Chekov!

Answer this. Could I today write a story about a young man on the eve of marriage who turns down a chance for a fuck with a married redhead partly out of timidity & partly out of moral conscience? Would it seem absurd? I have such a story all written in my head but keep putting it off. I also want to write the story about the painter on the Island, but it hasn't quite gelled yet either.

Thank you for telling me about the visit to A.M. Klein. Is he at home, or in a mental hospital?

What did you think about the Governor-General's Awards? I knew they would give it to those four books, but I don't think much of any of them. I'm sure posterity will not accept the contemporary verdict on Reaney's Suit of Nettles, most of which is childish pedantry. Execution is a barely competent novel. Joyce Hemlow's Fanny Burney is a sound but routine work of scholarship on a very minor figure. Berton's Klondike is merely goodish journalism. But then, one should have learned by now that these awards are a joke. But I can't remember that from year to year. When they give awards to Layton & Pacey, the awards will really mean something!

I'm busy reading Canadian short stories of the twenties & thirties. I'm amazed how many good stories were written between about 1928 & 1936--a real spate of them, especially in the Canadian Forum. Perhaps I'll do an article soon on the short stories of that period--though I'm really doing this for my share of the Literary History of Canada.
What's been wrong with you lately? Reading between the lines of your scanty letters, I seem to detect a sense of disappointment or betrayal. Am I just imagining things? Ron Everson was here last week, & Premier & Mrs Flemming had me in for lunch with him & his wife. Certainly an amiable guy—almost too amiable to be credible. Keep your pecker up, kid! Getting much these days?

Love,
Des P

PS Very sorry to hear of your mother's death. DP

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1Annual Meeting of the Royal Society, University of Montreal, 11 June 1956: General Session on Canadian Literature:
   Roy Daniells, "Religious Sensibility in Canadian Fiction."

2Fredericton was designated the Poet's Corner of Canada by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1947, in memory of local poets Bliss Carman, Charles G.D. Roberts and Francis Sherman.

3See 248.5.


51958 Governor-General's Award winners: James Reaney, A Suit of Nettles (Poetry), Colin McDougall, Execution (Fiction), Joyce Hemlow, The History of Fanny Burney, (Non-fiction) and Pierre Berton, Klondike (Non-fiction).

6Hugh John Flemming (1899-1982), Premier of New Brunswick 1952-60, MP for Victoria-Carleton 1962-72; and Aida (McCann) Flemming (1896-1994), teacher, journalist and founder of the Kindness Club (see 291.2).

7Lorna Jean (Austin) Everson.

256.

June 16, 1959

Dear Desmond,

I liked your story1 and, regrettably, I can't suggest any improvements. You don't waste words. You imply much: the pain of each person's aloneness, perversity, the savage lunacy in human affairs. My only question is whether you want to end up with Jackie's explicit words—"You can't trust anyone", etc. Besides making it didactic, it serves to narrow down the meanings of the story. I think you want something more suggestive there—something that will widen rather than narrow the approaches.

No, I wasn't referring to Dudek's review, but the other fellow's. I thought D's piece well written; as you say, "well-constructed". Some of the points he makes against you are just, but I don't like the tone of his review nor the kind of abstract position he seems to argue from. I'd level
the very criticism he levels against you: "he’s not with it".² He’s letting his critical intelligence (incubated in bookstacks) inhibit what should be a free response to another man’s experience. He’s beginning to exhibit that joylessness when confronted by stories and poems that all sufferers from literary acne do. He’s that familiar only too often met—the frustrated poet turned critic.

About my own poem—as usual you’re all wet. No, you’re not. Of course the poem is tripe. Like Shelley’s "Music When Soft Voices Die"³ or Yeats’ "On Being Asked For A War Poem".⁴ Wilson says it’s one of the best of my occasional pieces—saw the opposites the poem intended by seeing that a "tight arse" might be called "Division without vision".⁵ And as usual, when you don’t like a poem, the poets do—Purdy, Cohen, etc. Your blindness distresses me, but I see it’s chronic and I’ve made up my mind to bear with it as compassionately as a friend should.

I like your cocky mood. My own is no less cocky. I’ve just about finished my story, and you’ll definitely have it on your desk in about a week or so. I’ve made up my mind to bring out a book of short stories next September.

Don’t answer this letter. I shall write you again this Saturday. All my love to Mary.

Love,
Irving


²Layton refers to Dudek’s review of The Picnic: "His style, though pure, is too flaccid, and his sense of life too sad, too quiet, for these times. He is "not with it" in this respect (123).


⁵Milton Wilson, letter to Irving Layton, 18 May 1959, Layton Collection, Concordia University. [By the way, talking of "opposites," "division without vision" is a neat (implied) phrase for a "tight arse."]
taken both the "Wolfgang Russ" and the "Trilliums" poem\(^2\) which as I said to you earlier, he thinks one of the best occasional pieces I've done. The adjective he employed for "The Wolfgang Russ" poem is "monumental". You'll see the final version of it in the August number of the CE.

By god, it's hard to write prose! Especially when one hasn't written it for more than six years. That was when I wrote my last short story. Now there's this one\(^3\), and I hope you like it. Once I got down on the mat with it, it yielded readily enough. I'm still not entirely satisfied with it—the beginning is perhaps too long, and the ending too abrupt. However, I'll correct those defects when I come to type the story. The characters, I think, stand out well and sharply enough in all their complexity and the final dislocation of all the world's culture being poured into the indifferent ear of a tranquilized and wealthy boor a significant and vivid culmination of the other dislocations, the final one being that between the two lifelong friends. I'll be glad to hear from you what you make of it.

I expect to write two or three more this summer—and half-a-dozen poems. Now that things are settling down, I feel freer and happier than I have for some time, and this mood of cheerfulness and strength ought to yield some very nice work. We'll see. In the meantime you seem to be going great guns, and I'm very happy for you. I'd like to see your Richardson article when it's published. Will you send me a reprint of it?

Taking off a year for study is a good idea. But why go to England? Oxford & Cambridge are dead—in fact, all of England is, judging from reports I've gotten from all sorts of people who've recently been there. The States—there's the place for you. Still some lively spots left there—Columbia, or Chicago, the University of California. Or go to Israel or Poland. But England—you'd be wasting your time there. The Zeitgeist has vacated that land, and it's your business to find her present address.

How did I get the idea Frye was going to review your book? Well, in a note tacked onto the left hand corner at the top of your first page in your letter of May 31st, you had written "Try & listen," and your handwriting being what it is, I misread Frye for Try. Simple, ain't it?

Unfortunately, I was out of town on the 14th. How was it? What did Creighton say? To me it's still extraordinary that you write such damned good stories when you aren't supposed to—being as you are a critic and literary historian. Your achievement impresses me greatly. Keep up the good work. Have you read Sam Yellen's collection of short stories The Passionate Shepherd?\(^4\)

You see my problem with Ron Everson, now, don't you? He's too good to be true. I almost wish he didn't exist, so upsetting to my metaphysics do I find his existence. He still shows me his poems and I still make suggestions for their improvement. He poses a real ethical problem—make no mistake about that. It sometimes needs only the change of a
word or two, the transposition of a line to make a dead poem come alive, and this I have frequently done for his poems. But please don’t breathe a word about this to anyone.

Gov-Gen’s awards are ridiculous. If I’m given one for *A Red Carpet For The Sun*, I’ll throw it back into their faces. But you--didn’t you ever get one? Not even for *Ten Canadian Poets*? Surely you did.5

All my love to Mary.

Luff & kisses,
Irving

enclosure: “Dislocation”

1See 141.7.


3”Dislocation” was retitled “The World We Live In.” It was broadcast but not published: *Wednesday Night* CBC Radio, 24 Aug. 1960.


5pacey did not win a Governor General’s award; Layton won in 1959 for *A Red Carpet for the Sun*.

258. July 2, 1959

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of June 28, and the enclosed short story.

I think the story has significance as a document of our time, as an illustration of the word used in the title. (By the way, I’m not sure that I care for the title--doesn’t it suggest too directly & abstractly, the theme of the story?) There are a lot of good things in it--especially psychological insight. But I think at the moment it is too long--it needs paring down, tightening up. It’s as if, having turned temporarily from the obliqueness of poetry to the directness of prose you’d gone too far, stating & restating everything rather than relying even here on the power of suggestion. The story proceeds at a snail’s pace, especially in the early pages. Part of it is just sheer over-elaboration, especially for example in the adverbial phrases in the dialogue. The modern trend as you know is to set down dialogue without any adverbial trimmings; but if there are to be adverbial trimmings they should be fresh & original ones. Yours sound stiff & self-conscious--things like "seeing his troubled look", "his voice a blend of understanding & mockery", "rather sharply", "feeling myself absurd as I did so", "Morosely fingering his limp moustache"!!!

Then there are irrelevant details which distract us from the real focus of the story--eg the spinster from whom you bought the furniture (I can see that you could argue a
minor thematic function for her, but it wouldn’t really stand up). In fact the real focus of the story is never certain. Your attitude to the sick old man is ambivalent—and I’m inclined to think ambivalent in a bad sense. Is he a victim or a butt? I don’t mean that you should state in so many words that the old man deserves his fate, on the one hand, or is a victim of a false set of values in society on the other, but I do think the author, by suggestions & tone, should lead the sympathies definitely in one way or another. Of course there is such a thing as a deliberately ‘dry’ tone, a kind of detached irony of approach. But you don’t seem to be aiming for that. Your tone vacillates between sympathetic, compassionate involvement, and detachment and irony. I can’t get my emotional bearings in the story. I don’t care which approach you adopt, but I do care whether you maintain a consistent approach.

All this is beginning to sound very hostile, whereas actually I enjoyed the story and felt that it had elements of greatness in it. But I can’t help feeling that you haven’t really clarified your own intentions before writing this story, that what we have here is a groping for the real core of the experience rather than the core itself.

I daresay you will want to argue this, so I’ll not elaborate further now. My basic criticism may be boiled down to two propositions: 1) the details are over-stated, over-explained, over-elaborated; 2) the essence is understated, incompletely realized.

Now to turn to your letter. Glad to hear that Milton Wilson likes "Trilliums" & is using it in the Forum. I sent him "The Weasel", & he has accepted it for the Forum too.1 Perhaps we shall have the luck to appear in the same issue—though I gather he has quite a backlog of stories.

I have not yet read Wilson’s book on Shelley, but I have ordered it for the library & shall read it soon. I have found Wilson personally pleasant but a somewhat waffling critic of Canadian poetry. He strikes me as a very minor satellite around Frye’s sun, but perhaps I am being unfair. I [am] by no means immune to the natural human tendency to denigrate possible rivals!

You’d probably find my Richardson article pretty dull, pedantic stuff, though I tried to make it lively. Anyhow, Woodcock liked it. He originally suggested I do an article of from 3 to 5,000 words; the end result was something between 8 & 10,000; and he has agreed to publish the article in two parts in the first & second issues of his magazine. I’ll be glad to send you offprints when they appear.

About the values of study in England & the USA we had better agree to differ. I don’t like the American system of society or education, & have absolutely no desire to go there. I do like Cambridge, and it has the kind of leisured scholarly atmosphere which I need for a year or two. Harvard always impresses me as Ford Motor Co Plant of Higher Education—everybody working at top speed to earn not so much money as prestige—just academic status seekers.
England may be washed up politically, but culturally she still has much to give—a sense of serenity, a grace, an appreciation of learning worn lightly but for its own sake.

I very much feel the need for leisure at the moment. My nerves are raw with the effort of trying to carry on three big jobs at the same time—1) do research on the Literary History of Canada, 2) teach three courses (Creative Writing, Milton & 20th Century Poets) at Summer School; and 3) acting Dean of Graduate Studies. So if you hear that Pacey has run berserk, don't be too surprised.

Creighton was not very kind. Said my stories showed compassion, understanding etc etc but were too flat & dull. Thought I had good powers of social & natural observation, & a sense of pity, & that the best story was "The Lost Girl" which combined these.2

Mary is going up each day to Pinsky's painting class. Our eldest daughter looks after the small children each morning so that Mary can do that. It's a nice change for her, & she has a great admiration for Pinsky. I believe he is an excellent teacher.

I must get ready for [a] lecture on Thomas Hardy's poetry now, so I'll have to close. Mary & I both send our love.

As ever,
Des P


2 I have not been able to locate a copy of Creighton's review in order to locate this remark.

July 10, 1959
Dear Desmond,

This will surprise you, but I think each one of your criticisms of "Dislocation" is justified. The weaknesses & defects in the story were apparent to me when I sent it off to you: I felt that the beginning ached and dragged, and that the writing was too chalky. I'm glad, however, to have your sharp eye trained on them, for now self-love or indolence will not make me waver in the ruthless excisions I'll have to make if the story is to shape up into anything. It is encouraging that despite its numerous faults, you still saw "elements of greatness" in it. I value your judgement, since I think you know a helluva lot about writing stories, and have a knowledge of the craft that would astonish some of your critics and detractors, including Louis Dudek. It wasn't that some of the points he made against you were not justified, but that he missed completely their virtues, the most impressive for me, a sense of form and a quiet finish that gives them their air of authority. I think the Creighton gal is mistaken in her estimate of The Picnic—the more I think of your book the more I like it. It is easy to overlook the excellence of
your stories since they appear in such a modest and unassuming guise—your last story, "The Weasel", I wonder how many will feel the passion and the anguished sense of human perversity that went into the writing of it. I wonder.

Of course if it’s peace you want—by all means go to Cambridge. Why didn’t you say so? I didn’t know you wanted to do anything academically with your year. Your paragraph on the subject sounded Augustan, almost Addisonian1 I’d say. That sort of thing—excuse me—is hogwash to me. Use the year to rub shoulders with the world; live in dives, brothels, etc. Myself, I’m going to do just that for I leave for France in two weeks to make a walking tour from Paris to Rome.2 I’m going alone.

All my love to Mary.

Luff & kisses,
Irving

enclosure: A Red Carpet for the Sun and [ts] "Keine Lazarovitch"3

1The Augustan period in English literature (the name is borrowed from the age of Emperor Augustus of Rome—the age of Horace and Virgil) refers to the early eighteenth century era of Pope, Swift, Steele and Joseph Addison (1672-1719), distinguished essayist and prose stylist whose work Dr Johnson characterized as "familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious" (in Lives of the Poets, Works, VII: 473).

2Layton travelled in France and Italy during late July, August and early September 1959 with Aviva.


260. July 13, 1959

Dear Irving,

Thank you very much indeed for Red Carpet & for your letter of July 10 & the poem for your mother. I enjoyed all of them very much.

Red Carpet is a handsome book in format, and the contents are superb. The poems are so uniformly excellent that no one can any longer have any doubts that you are the best Canadian poet ever, and my feeling is there isn’t a poet alive today with a more impressive output except Eliot & possibly Frost. In the Canadian race, there just isn’t any competition—you win by a mile. I have enjoyed the poems individually, but collectively they are overwhelming.

The poem for your mother is one of your best—grave, dignified, compassionate & yet not sentimental or maudlin. I do wonder whether "lousiness" isn’t a bit too colloquial1—it has shock value, but too much of a shock? But the rest is fine, fine, fine.

Glad you didn’t resent my critique of your story—and thanks for all your kind comments about mine.
I envy you your trip to France. I'd love to go through dives & brothels—but how can I, with a wife & seven children? I am trapped in & by domesticity, & must make the best of it.

Mary reciprocates your hugs & kisses. What about Aviva? You haven't mentioned her for a long time.

Love,
Des

1"And the inescapable lousiness of growing old;" line 8, "Keine Lazarovitch."

261.[pc] July 22, 1959
Dear Desmond,

I returned from the country where I had a delightful time with Aviva and the children to find your wonderful letter awaiting me. I'm a much modester man than the world knows or suspects, and your enthusiastic compliments about A Red Carpet For The Sun made me dance about the room so wildly that books fell out of their shelves in astonishment. And needless to say, your appreciation of the poem to my mother gave my poor overworked heart an extra throb. In the country I wrote two more poems which I'm too lazy to type out for you but which you'll see in the fall issue of TR1 along with the poem to my mother. I think they're good things and that you'll like them. I've made one more last attempt at a reconciliation with Bet. No dice. So it's divorce and another marriage.2 Aviva is wonderful.

All my love,
Irv


2Layton and Aviva did not formally marry, although they had celebrated a mock wedding (a humorous incident related in Cameron's biography 276-77) in the spring of 1958, after which Aviva called herself Aviva Layton.

262.[pc] American Express, Paris
July 30, 1959
Dear Desmond,

Here I am in Paris in the famous 5th Arrondissement on the Boulevard St Germain. What a city, what a civilization! I feel at once newborn and old. For the past three days I've been walking varicose veins into my legs, traversing on foot the length and breadth of the city, gaping at everything with unabating delight and amazement. The scales have dropped from my eyes—I'm a poor, ignorant provincial. There's so much I have to learn. These people know how to live and they do it with a style and finesse that makes everyone else appear crude by comparison. Whether they combine style with creative vigour or intellectual curiosity, I have yet to learn, for so far I've not met any
native Frenchman I could talk to. From my own experience I know that every psychological gain exacts its price. Could it be that their poise is bought at the cost of imagination? The Parisians strike me as if they had deliberately suppressed the terrors of living or embodied them in the grotesque gargoyles on the Church of Notre Dame—and forgotten them. But it is too soon to generalize—particularly since I haven't talked to a living Frenchman yet. I'm having a wonderful time. What food, wines, colours and movement. I could live here forever.

Love,
Irving

263.[pc] August 21, 1959
Dear Desmond,

I've seen too much to say I've assimilated it all. My mind is one vast buzzing confusion of buildings, paintings, villas, catacombs and busts, busts, busts—ancient and modern. From Paris, Aviva and I went to Milan, and from there we hitchhiked to Venice, stopping briefly at Verona and Padua. We stayed in Venice for five days where I wrote a poem and where we swam at the Lido. We walked, smelled and tasted. Then we took the train to Rome and we've been here long enough to fall in love all over again with the Italians and with Rome which has been a terrific experience for both of us. Two days ago we visited the Protestant Cemetery where Keats and Shelley are buried. Then we went to the Pensione where Keats died and which has been turned into a Keats-Shelley Museum. It was one of the loveliest days I've spent since coming to Europe.

Love to Mary,
Irv

1The chief channels between the sandy islands separating the Lagoon of Venice from the Adriatic are Lido, Malamocco and Chioggia.

2Keats' final months were spent in a pensione on the Piazza di Spagna.

264.[pc] September 14, 1959
Dear Desmond,

Europe was a terrific experience, but I am glad to be back in Montreal. Did you get the postcards I sent you from Paris and Rome—or was it Venice? I hitchhiked with Aviva from Milan to Venice and learned a great deal doing so—one of the things being that only a reckless fool hitch-hikes on the narrow Italian roads. I wrote several good poems which you'll be seeing in the autumn number of TR (5 poems). The most beautiful women in the world menstruate in Rome, and I wrote a longish poem and a very good one indeed, immortalizing them. Another longish poem, very Rabelaisian & lively, will appear in an early issue of the Can Forum ("The Song of Pisicus"). So you see, Europe pumped a lot
of adrenalin into my bloodstream. Good thing Aviva was with me or I'd have raped the Italian women, one after the other, so desirably voluptuous are they. Did you and Mary get away for the summer, or a part of it?

Life is wonderful. Love to Mary,

Irv

1See 261.1.


3An early title for "The Day Aviva Came to Paris;" see 289.1.

265.

September 18, 1959

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your postcard of the 14th inst. I am delighted to know that you are back in Canada. I had no idea how long you expected to stay in Europe & had fancied that it would be for a year or so. Surely you didn’t run through the Canada Council grant in six weeks or so?

Yes, I got some postcards from France & Italy. Your enthusiasm seemed to be boundless & left me feeling rather sorry for my earthbound existence. I don’t see how I can possibly get away to Europe or elsewhere for years & years to come. I did toy with the idea of taking next year off to go to England, but when I discovered the price of the boatfare for myself & Mary & six children I had to conclude that it was just out of the question.

I have got myself nicely trapped in a state of bourgeois domesticity, and shall never be able to extricate myself as far as I can see. After eleven years I finally managed to pay off the mortgage on this house we live in, and fondly imagined that money problems would be far less acute. Now Mary is agitating for a completely new kitchen, new livingroom rug & furniture etc. For the first time relations between us are seriously strained—I feel that she has fallen hook, line & sinker for the women’s magazine ads. to the effect that you must have the latest type of stove, counter-tops etc etc in order to maintain your status.

In fact I am at the moment in a state approaching despondency. I have struggled to bring up a family, & yet they seem not to care a tinker’s damn (& of course why should they—they didn’t ask to be conceived); I have written six or eight books with blood, sweat & tears and yet silly buggers like Kildare Dobbs poke fun at me & no one seems to consider the books at all important—and so on & so on.

However, I should not go on in this self-pitying vein—that way madness lies. There have been a few bright spots. My eldest son, Philip, a quiet, shy, but very sensitive lad, came second in the province on his matrics & won a National Scholarship to McGill to take chemistry. He was to arrive in Montreal last Thursday morning & is staying in Douglas
Hall. We haven't had a letter from him yet, but I assume he's settling in.

We had a rather complicated holiday this year, & one which wasn't very restful for me. About August 12, right after Summer School, we drove to Prince Edward Island where we had a cottage by the sea for ten days. Mary spent practically all her time painting, while I looked after the kids. I don't mind doing this for a few days, as Mary gets precious little time to paint when she has all the housework to do, but it does mean that I came back as tired as when I went. Well, we came back about August 23, had two or three days here washing clothes etc, then headed for Mary's parents' home in Ottawa. After a day or two there, I took the two younger boys with me to visit my mother, had three days with her, then back to Ottawa to pick up Mary & the girls, & then back here for Labour Day. There was just too much driving (which with 6 children in the car is pretty nerve-racking) in too short a time—with the result that I landed back here tired & irritable to start the new term.

I don't feel much enthusiasm for writing at the moment. Lorne Pierce is after me for three books: (1) a collected edition of my children's verse; (2) a revised edition of A Treasury of Prose & Verse as a Grade XII textbook; (3) an anthology of Canadian poetry. The idea of (3) interests me most. The tentative plan is to do a book tentatively entitled Major Canadian Poets which would be a sort of matching anthology to my 10 CP. I should include the ten, plus you & a few others—perhaps fifteen poets in all, or possibly as many as twenty but certainly not more. The idea would be that this would be a new sort of anthology in Canada, differing from Smith & Gustafson in giving people a chance really to savour the better poets rather than to sip sixty or seventy versifiers. What do you think of the idea? And whom would you suggest including? If I put in 15 poets, I'm thinking of including the ten, plus you, Livesay, Dudek, Souster, & Reaney.

Anyway, I do wish this or something else would set me on fire with the kind of joie de vivre I used to have & which you seem still to possess so abundantly.

But who am I to complain? I just finished reading Stuart Gilbert's edition of The Letters of James Joyce—and what a life that poor bugger had! His books rejected, banned, vilified; his daughter mad & his son a failure; almost blind, subject to nervous breakdowns & stomach ulcers himself—etc etc. I suppose I should be damned grateful that things have not been worse for me than they have. If only one could learn resignation, to accept the fact that life is, & is bound to be, a dirty, miserable business & that five minutes pleasure in every twenty-four hours of sorrow or boredom is the best that one can hope for.

Well, that card of yours gave me five minutes pleasure. I liked the typical Laytonian remark "The most beautiful women menstruate in Rome"—I do hope you will send copies of
the new poems. But why none for the Fiddlehead? Is it just another venture into which I have put energy to no avail?

Sorry to be so sour—but I’d not be honest to pretend otherwise at the moment.

Love,
Des P

1Pacey’s eldest son, Philip, was a freshman at McGill.

2Mary (Pacey) Boulton lived on a farm in Glanford Station (near Caledonia), outside of Hamilton, Ontario.

3Pacey’s collected edition of children’s verse, The Cat, the Cow and the Kangaroo was published in 1969 (see 580.1); rather than revising Ryerson’s A Treasury of Prose and Verse, Pacey began work on a new anthology, Our Literary Heritage (see 318 & 321); his proposed Major Canadian Poets evolved into Selections from Major Canadian Writers (see 318).


266. September 25, 1959
Dear Desmond,

My classes at Sir GW began this week: in one I have 40 students and in the other, one. That’s in my course in Creative Writing, but I shan’t draw any pessimistic conclusion from this solitary registration. Actually, it’s the result of what I did in this same course last year. Then, about a dozen hopefuls registered; in about 15 minutes of the first lecture I completely disabused them of the notion that they were poets—even would-be ones. Once the air was cleared, I proceeded to give them a very businesslike course in Yeats and Eliot. The rumours must have spread through the college corridors that I meant business—if you were a poet, good!, but if you weren’t there wasn’t any point in signing up for the course. The one hopeful this year is a middle-aged woman. I gave her my famous devastating "This—is—a—poet speech" and I should be greatly astonished if she showed up next week.

Then, too, this week—in fact, just last night—there was a cocktail party for ARCFTS at the Windsor Hotel which Jack McClelland threw. I was quite a lion, having let my hair grow for the occasion since the middle of July. By now, my head looks quite massive, almost Yeatsian, though with only streaks of poetic silver; however, I have an impressive lock of hair falling across my forehead which, if I weren’t the moral man I am, could be good for a dozen swift & easy seductions. Anyway, the party was a great success, Bob Weaver and several others having come from Toronto with JMcc for it. From the hotel we went to McC’s agent’s house where the party flourished until 2am. Everyone in TV or radio, in the newspaper or bookselling game was present when I made my great entry—and what an entry it was! I was flanked by Aviva on one side, and by Leonard Cohen on the other, and I needed both of them to run
interference for me as the mob bore down. For the next hour I was busy autographing, grimacing, talking, having my hand pumped vigorously, and what not while everyone waited for me to do a Dylan Thomas act. I didn’t even pretend to try! That’s not called for in the contract, you know, though Jack was hovering around me flashbulbing all over the place. It was a great evening. Aviva overheard two booksellers disputing as to who had given the book the better window-display and who was selling the book faster. Sales seem very brisk, and several booksellers have assured Jack the book will sell out—all 5,000 of them. If they do, this of course will make history.

But that’s enough happy bragging for one letter. In the midst of the celebration I was overheard to say "All this is fine, but it has nothing to do with the poem I’m presently working on." So help me, I did say those words. And I also embarrassed a banker by flatly contradicting him when he said to me (with the best of intentions) that my "success" was like that of his own, or like that of anybody who strives hard, sacrifices etc, etc. I told him I hadn’t striven for success, that no poet really does, but only to write a good poem, and then another one, and so on. He searched for an answer to that at the bottom of his whisky glass, but not finding it there he finally gave up.

Last Saturday I went to the Univ of Montreal to hear a certain Mr Roy defend a PhD thesis titled "Symbolism in Canadian Poetry 1880-1939." Al Purdy and Leonard Cohen came along with me, and a burgeoning novelist by the name of John Mills. Well, Mr Roy referred very appreciatively to your work several times in the course of his defense. Without a doubt, you are this country’s foremost literary historian, and that you can also write sensitive criticism and short stories puts you in a unique class by yourself. You’ve done, and you are still doing, important work. By now I hope your mood of depression has lifted, and that all is sweet amiability between you and Mary. I think you’ve had a rough time of it this summer: chaps as highstrung as you and myself need lots of rest and it doesn’t look as if you’ve had it this year. I wish it were possible for you to get away by yourself for a week or so—perhaps you could come to Montreal. I warrant you my little one and I would lift your spirits; well, anyhow, we’d try. Both of us think you’re tops.

L.P.’s idea strikes me as being a terrific one. An anthology such as you project is what’s so very badly needed in this country. Together with an introduction by yourself, it would give the reader the kind of steerage he needs and which no existing anthology supplies. To the five additional names you mention, I can think of only Page (whose work I find more interesting than Livesay’s) Finch, and Leonard Cohen whose second book McClelland & Stewart are bringing out next fall. It contains some of the best love lyrics written in our time. He’s a genuine poet and already
has the large beginnings of a significant body of work. You
might ask him to send you the manuscript.

Love to Mary.

Love,
Irving

1George Roy, "Symbolism in English-Canadian Poetry 1880-1939." diss., Université de
Montréal, 1959.

2John Mills (b. 1930), novelist and short story writer, Professor of English at Simon
Fraser University, author of Skevington's Daughter (1978) and Lizard in the Grass (1980).

3Lorne Pierce.

4Robert Finch (1900— ), poet, scholar of French literature at the University of Toronto,
twice a winner of the Governor General’s Award for Poetry: Poems (1940) and Acis in Oxford (1959).

5The Spice-Box of Earth; see 123.5.

September 29, [1959]

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of the 25th.

Funny that your Creative Writing class should be so
small—with all the excitement of Red Carpet I should have
thought you would have had a mob. My first Creative Writing
session is this afternoon at 2:30, and rumour has it that
there are at least 30 clamouring to get in. I've never
allowed more than 12 to take it before, so I shall have to
prune some of them out. I think the reasons for the influx
are 1) the enthusiasm of last year's class, who have 'talked
it up' to other students, and 2) the newly formed magazine
Intervales, which offers an outlet for the best work in the
class, and 3) the existence of the $75 Roberts Prize for the
best short story.

Delighted to hear of the big shenanigans by your
publishers for your public. I hope your sales reach
astronomical proportions.

Thanks for your kind words about my importance. Sorry
I wrote you such a depressed letter—but what's a friend for
if not to provide a shoulder for weeping? I do feel much
more cheerful now, and certainly relations between Mary & me
are back on a happy basis. It was just a temporary spat
between us, & I shouldn't have mentioned it. I do have a
feeling that Ten Canadian Poets failed to receive its due,
but time will prove the book's worth. Getting back to
lectures has done more than anything to buck me up—I do
love teaching, & my students seem to recognize that &
respond enthusiastically.

Glad you think that anthology would be a good idea. I
shall consider your suggestions carefully.

What did you think of Reaney's song cycle (from an
opera Night Blooming Cereus) in a recent CF? I thought the
poems were plain silly—naive & childish doggerel. Am I blind to their merits, or did you agree?

Did I tell you of Mary’s success at the Provincial Exhibition here? She entered paintings in eight classes & received five firsts, two seconds, & a third. Of course the competition was regional rather than national, but still it was a great boost for her morale. Perhaps a slight feeling of jealousy had something to do with my irritability!

What do you think of Kruschev’s visit? The sudden transformation in the world situation is terrifically encouraging, I feel. Perhaps I am naively optimistic, but I foresee an era of peace & intense cultural development. The artist will come into his own, & the generals & scientists of the military variety will be in the ashcan. I thought K was terrific, & I don’t see how the Americans can resist his proposals indefinitely.

Send along any new poems you write. I must get down to some new stories myself.

Love & kisses,
Des P


2Prime Minister Kruschev paid an official visit to the United States September 15-28, during which he addressed the UN General Assembly on September 18 calling for new and far-reaching proposals for "general and complete disarmament."

268. October 8, 1959
Dear Desmond,

Probably you saw the Tabloid presentation of the 5 Cndn poets last Friday,1 and if so I hope you were as much amused by it as I was. One poet is absurd enough—but five of them! Takes all the mystery, all the richness & strangeness out of them, to see them arrayed in such ridiculous plenitude. Diminishing returns, marginal utility, and all that sort of thing. And all of us—even your humble servant—so well-behaved, so insufferably correct. A good burp from either Avison or Jay Macpherson would have saved the day. I think a bunch of hairdressers or even lace-makers would have made a more colourful show. Avison, in fact, told me just before we went into the studio: "All my life I’ve waited for a chance to speak to the people, and now that I have the chance, I find I have nothing to say."

I like Avison. I saw her the next day and spent some time with her. She has lots of intensity (repressed libido?) and a first class mind. A good sense of fun too. She gave me a description of a meeting she attended at the English Club of Victoria College in which a three-cornered fight sprang up between Reaney, Macpherson, and Frye as to who could give each other the most exquisite compliment. "As Mr. Reaney says in his poems..." says Frye, upon which Reaney leaps to his feet and says "As Mr. Frye points out in
his *Anatomy of Criticism*"....Anyhow that is how Avison spelled it out to me, but it may have been only her pique at being left out from so stimulating an intellectual ambience. Had I been present too, Avison and I would have been giving each other pills to keep from vomiting.

Jack McClelland made another cocktail party for me & *The Red Carpet*. It’s fun to be lionized. Everyone connected with radio, TV, and journalism was there. Ralph Allen, Edinborough, John Marshall of the Toronto Telegram --E.J. Pratt turned up also, and I was very touched by that since I had been told his health was poor and he never leaves the house. However, he seemed hearty enough and got in his usual quota of stag jokes. His greeting to me was: "How are your gonads?" "Fine", I said, "how are yours?" He’s got the most unself-regarding look I’ve ever seen on a man’s face.

The book is doing exceptionally well. Certainly the reviews have been laudatory—have you seen Roy Fuller’s in *Canadian Literature*? I suppose you have. The familiar mixture of English condescension and obtuseness (slight content—the idiot!) but at least he did make one or two proper salaams in my direction. Jack McC opines *Red Carpet* will sell out, all 5,000 copies, before Xmas. If that happens, it will establish some kind of record for this country. Imagine a book of poetry becoming a bestseller! Next week I’m scheduled to give a reading at the Ryerson Institute and another one at the English Graduates’ Club of the Univ of Toronto. I believe I’ve already written to tell you Scott, Leonard Cohen and myself will be reading next month at the YMHA poetry centre in New York. That too will be historic. Perhaps you can come down for it—there’ll be a gang going down from here and we ought to all have one helluva bang-up time. Do you think you can? I’d help with the expenses if you did.

There’ll be five new poems of mine in *TR*, the fall number. One of them you’ve seen, that’s the one for my mother. I’m enclosing another, "The Tragic Sense", not because I think it’s the best, but because it’s the shortest of the lot. Wait till you see "Women of Rome". I think you’ll like it very much. Did you see Hugh Kenner’s review of *A Laughter in the Mind* in Sept issue of *Poetry Chi*? He says some extraordinarily perspicacious things about my work; he’s the only one to have seen that like Yeats I played with masks. And yet—have I really? We’re all of us so many different people: it’s only the poet and the novelist who can give each one of them a tongue and a separate identity. A total identity—maybe only a stone ever achieves that.

I’m glad to hear from you that things have righted themselves between you and Mary. It didn’t look like anything too serious from here, though like any man who’s been married for as long as you have, you’re bound to feel strains, emotional, sexual, etc. If ever you feel trapped again, give yourself a good holiday. It’ll take a good deal
of courage, and you may or may not crack under the experience, but you’ll be a different man in many ways. If you feel like breaking loose, why then, break loose. Chuck up everything! Become a beach-comber. Anything is better than middle-class sterility. Of course I’ve put the extremest antithesis to your present way of life—a sort of psychological carrot to see and contemplate whenever you feel despondent and drained of joy. Actually, I think you’re a happy fellow most of the time; happy with your work, your accomplishments, and not least your "best Mary". A man who has sired seven children is already something of a hero. And heroes, as you know, are not always happy.

My own affairs run on an even keel. The greatest gain this year, is the complete absence of conflict. None of the torture I experienced twelve months ago. Maxie has begun visiting me Sundays. He has his supper here, and then he, Aviva, and I go to the flicks. Leonard Cohen is teaching him to play the guitar, and he tells me he has a very genuine talent for the instrument. He also writes an excellent prose, and he’s exceedingly good-looking. So is Sissyboo. Just now my heart is full of them.

All my love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

enclosure: ts The Tragic Sense
Hugh Kenner review; see .10.

1"Canadian Poetry Today," Tabloid CBC Television, 2 October 1959.


4John Marshall, journalist with The Toronto Telegram.


8See 261.1.


10Kenner notes the preoccupation with "masks" in Layton:
He does not mind figuring as cynic, clown, lecher, or benevolent Caliban, father, historian, or tavern wit; he senses, apparently, that the only way for him to function in such a milieu is to work out the implications of self-sufficient acts of the imagination. (418)


269.

Saturday [October 17, 1959pm]

Dear Desmond,

Tomorrow I leave once more for Toronto for readings at Ryerson and Toronto Univ. Also a Fighting Words program. June Callwood was down this week to do a story on me for the Star Weekly and sat in on my Tuesday evening class at Sir GW. Afterwards we had a drink and she again trained her inquisitorial pencil at me. A very attractive woman, and sensitive beyond the call of her profession. Perhaps that is what makes her the top feature writer in this country. Have written another poem, "Dans Le Jardin". I think you’d like it. Damn it, I wish I liked writing prose as much as I like writing poetry. Like an alcoholic I keep on swearing off the stuff, but...

Why don’t you and Mary join me in New York? It’s a great life—but what is it all about?

Love,
Irv

1Fighting Words, CBC Television, 18 October 1959. (Panelists Irving Layton, William Blatz, George Grant and Rabbi A. Feinberg; moderator Nathan Cohen.)

2June Callwood (b. 1924), journalist and civil libertarian; prominent magazine writer in the 1950s, she became an activist for social causes in the 60s; author of The Law Is Not for Women (1976) and Portrait of Canada (1981).


270.

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of October 8 and your card of Saturday. Sorry to have been so incommunicative lately, but I’ve been hellish busy--classes all day, & meetings every night. I expect I shall remain hellish busy all year, as we have a record number of students at all levels of the university. I am inundated with a record number in Creative Writing (26, which is virtually impossible for the workshop type of course I like to run), in my senior honours course on the novel (16), and in my graduate course on Canadian Literature (11). And these are only the advanced classes--I have my share of freshmen & sophomores too, & there the numbers are much much larger.
Then all the meetings. I am chairman of about six major committees, including the library committee which has a very busy schedule, and secretary of the Faculty—the latter of which means in effect that I represent the Faculty on the administration of the University & am called in by the president on anything & everything.

[Pause here & listen to the air escaping—I’m pricking the bubble of my own ego as I re-read this! Phew...]

I’m not complaining, as I enjoy a full life, but all this does cut down on my opportunities for writing. I’m committed to a hell of a lot of writing too—but so far this term have done virtually fuck-all. I have prepared the ms for the proposed collected edition of my children’s verse, but I haven’t done a tap yet on that High School anthology, nor the poetry anthology, nor the revised edition of my Book of Canadian Stories, the third edition of which is now sold out. My book on Grove' is also sold out, & should be revised & re-issued. And all of this in a way is hack work—when am I going to get time to re-write my novel, & write some more short stories?

Have you seen the new Atlantic Anthology? I was supposed to be going to be represented in it by my poem "Vignettes of Love," but there was a last minute switch to my story "The Lost Girl". It would have been fun to figure as a poet—but a bit of a phony role for me.

Well, enough of me. You seem to be riding high these days—cocktail parties, window displays etc etc. Watch out you don’t get caught with your bare arse in the window one of these days. By god, you’re becoming a bloody lion, & you know in many ways I liked you better when you were a flea-bitten terrier. You’re beginning to sound like a self-important son of a bitch who actually believes his own publicity agent. Get to hell off your high horse & act like Layton again, will you? I don’t want to come up to Montreal in mid-December (as Mary & I hope to do) & find you such a bloody stuffed shirt that you won’t speak to me. Who the hell are you fooling anyway?

Love & kisses,
Desmond

1Desmond Pacey, Frederick Philip Grove: a Biographical and Critical Study (Toronto: Ryerson, 1945).


Dear Desmond,

Don't become angry with me because I'm having a walloping good time. We're so made we sympathize easily enough with the beggar, with the unlucky ones of the earth—and we damned well hate the successful, for to sympathize with good fortune requires the greater magnanimity. Your picture of me as a potential stuffed shirt is too far-fetched to even evoke from me the smile of rebuttal. It's one role, I'm afraid I shall never be able to play. I guess you're human enough to almost wish that I did, so that you could wag a virtuous finger over my head and feel superior at my descent from goodness. If you are, my advice to you is that you keep your finger warm in your arsehole for I shall never give you cause to remove it from there.

In describing for you the cocktail parties, etc, I thought you'd detect the note of amusement and self-irony with which I looked on the entire proceedings. Of course, it's fun being lionized, but you're a goat if you think it means anything more to me than a pleasant way of spending an afternoon or an evening. And anyhow, all this hullabaloo is no compensation for the break-up of my marriage, and the loss all at the same time (and pretty much for the same reasons) of my best friend, Dudek. You're the biggest fathead in the world if you think that a devotion to poetry which lost me wife, children, and friend can be corrupted by a few busy words of praise. But to hell with this note of self-pity: this is certainly not the occasion for it, if ever there is one. Actually, the only thing that has happened is that people and critics (I'm not really making a distinction between them) have finally begun to concur in my own opinion of myself—I mean, of my poetry. The only thing that astonishes me is that they were so slow in getting there!

All this is good for poetry in this country. A poet has at last broken the sound barrier! You ought to rejoice that one of us, and that one your own devoted friend, turned the trick. What's more, much of your criticism helped me do it. You're a funny dog! You yelp and wag your tail excitedly while I'm battling the waves and gasping, but when you see [me] nearing the beach you let your tail droop and you let out the most mournful howl my ears ever heard. Now's the time I need good friends around me; I know my weaknesses and they're many, but they're not the ones you impute to me. Impatience, intemperance, thoughtlessness; I could go on and on. Notice, I do not say egotism or vanity or envy; I know my worth and what I can do and what I can't and no one who has worked as long as I have on his craft but must come to humility in the end. I'm a long, long way from what I'd like to do. To be quite frank with you, I'd like to one day win the Nobel Prize for literature. Why not? Say in ten or fifteen years? Well, go ahead and laugh, but at least you won't be able to convict me of complacency or
imagine that I intend now to rest content with fingering the bay-leaves on my noble forehead. I have a way of making my dreams come true, and this is my latest and best dream.

Well, I see I’ve written a sort of *apologia vita mea*^2 but damn it all, you provoked it so you have only yourself to blame if it bores you. We’ll have a good talk with you when you and Mary are here, and I promise you I’ll leave my asbestos-lined stuffed shirt at home. All my love to Mary.

Hugs, Irving


^1Layton was nominated for the Nobel Prize by Italy, supported by Korea, in 1981.

^2Latin: defence of my life.

272. [c. October 24–31, 1959]

Dear Desmond,

Shakespeare was wrong: It’s not in adversity a man loses his friends, but in prosperity. 1

It seems my success has gone more to my friends’ heads than to my own.

Keep your eyes on the ball, you silly old coot:

1) I still write poetry.

2) I’m still a humble teacher in a High School, working 20 full hours, besides holding down several other jobs. Haven’t gone in for the big money in TV, Radio, Journalism, etc.

3) I still speak my mind as bluntly as forcibly as ever. Haven’t turned respectable, that is.

4) Of course I enjoy all the noise but no more than I do a good fuck or a drink. Would it please you more if I pulled a long face and played the modern hypocrite?

5) Why are people such malicious imbeciles?

Love,

Irving

enclosure: ts "Piazza San Marco", "Dans le Jardin" and "In Praise of Benefactors."

^1 "The great man down, you mark his favorite flies

The poor advanced makes friends of enemies.

And hitherto doth love on fortune lend,

For who not needs shall never lack a friend,

And who in want a hollow friend doth try

Directly seasons him his enemy."

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letters & poems. Sorry to have been so long writing, but I have been very busy. Also, I do seem to be in a depressed mood this fall & can't seem to get enthusiastic about writing letters or anything else. There is no specific cause for this, so far as I know--just a general feeling that life is unheroic & unrewarding. I imagine some glandular disturbance is at the root of the feeling, and I trust soon to throw it off--but you must bear with me if I seem less responsive than usual. It is not that I have cooled in my feeling for you but simply that all my reactions are dulled.

"Piazza San Marco" is a good poem, though it has not the finality of Eliot's "Burbank with a Baedeker" or of your own best poems. It seems to me to state the obvious in a rather obvious way. I'm afraid I feel much the same about "In Praise of Benefactors", although it does achieve a kind of resonant authority in the final two lines. But much the best of them--& this not simply because it is "sexy"--is "Dans le Jardin", which has more of everything--ie more freshness of vision & phrase, more music, more strength of utterance & conviction. This last is one of your better efforts.

Now for your letters. Of course I was to a large degree kidding about your stuffiness, conceit, etc. I do think, however, that you have a real dilemma before you: having made your name & fame as a critic of bourgeois values, you are now enjoying being lionized by the proud possessors of those values. But the dilemma is to some degree a false one, because bourgeois society is to a large degree self-critical & will permit you to be a bit of a wild lion. You may survive intact, but I think you'll have to be doubly alert. I don't think it's envy on my part, for whenever I have thought of the possibility of being lionized I have always instinctively shrunk from it. I have always refused opportunities to autograph my books in bookstores etc because I hate the exhibitionism involved in such activities. However, I don't especially count this a virtue, & don't resent the trace of exhibitionism in you. It's a temperamental affair merely, not a moral one.

I heard Milton Wilson's review of your book on Critically Speaking & thought it was a good one--fair, balanced, appreciative, but not gushy.

The chief activities here lately have been in the realm of painting rather than of literature. Goodridge Roberts & his wife Joan are here this year, the former as resident artist & Mary & I have had them in to dinner, have been to various parties for them, & this last week heard him lecture on his experiences in painting. Then of course we had [the] official opening of the new Beaverbrook Art Gallery, at which Mary acted as hostess (since she is president of the Fredericton Society of Artists). We had tea with his Lordship one afternoon too. Then last week there was the
opening at the Gallery of the exhibition of paintings by Maritime Artists. Mary had her picture on the front page of the Gleaner standing beside her painting, a portrait (or rather, figure study) of our youngest daughter, Penny. Alan Jarvis was here to judge the exhibition (his prizes have not yet been announced) & during his stay called me in to invite me to become Maritime Editor of Canadian Art, which is to be enlarged & reorganized with Jarvis as editor-in-chief. I agreed to try the job for awhile, though I am not sure that I know enough about painting to do the job adequately.

Next Monday evening I travel to Saint John to speak to the University Women's Club there on "Recent Canadian Poetry". I plan to make Red Carpet for the Sun the focus of my talk.

Yours as ever,
Des Pacey


2Wilton Wilson, rev. of A Red Carpet for the Sun by Irving Layton, Critically Speaking CBC Radio, 1 Nov. 1959.

3Goodridge Roberts (1904-74), artist, nephew of C.G.D. Roberts; in 1959 Roberts became the first artist-in-residence at UNB; in 1969 he was honoured by a retrospective exhibition organized by the National Gallery of Canada.

4The official opening of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery (see 129.6) took place on September 16, 1959.

5Lord Beaverbrook; see 173.8.

6The Daily Gleaner 29 October 1959: 1.

7Alan Jarvis (1915-1972), editor, lecturer, sculptor, director of the National Gallery of Canada (1956-9), editor Canadian Art (1959-63), editor of The Gallery of Canadian Art and The Things We See (1946).

8Pacey served as Maritime Correspondent/Advisory Editor for Canadian Art from January, 1960 (#67; 17.1) until December 1962 (#82, 19.6).

November 13, 1959
Dear Irving,
I believe you owe me a letter, but there are two reasons for my writing:

1) I enclose the first draft of a short story I have just written, & I should like your comments on it. I feel myself that it needs revision & expansion—it's a sort of sketch at the moment. But is it worth working on, & what would you do to it?

2) I want to tell you that I had a very successful evening in Saint John earlier this week addressing the
University Women’s Club on "Recent Canadian Poetry". I began by talking about the importance of poetry as a) language & b) vision, then briefly reviewed the dev’t of Can poetry up to 1948, & then gave a fairly detailed account of the past decade, culminating with Red Carpet for the Sun in 1959. I read poems by Reaney, Macpherson, & George Johnston, (one from each), & then four of yours to suggest your four main aspects: a) social protest in "De Bullion Street"², b) nature description & humility & tenderness--"First Snow, Lake Achigan"³, c) sex, as in "Earth Goddess"⁴, d) satire, as in "Anglo-Canadian".⁵ Incidentally, "First Snow" is a poem of yours I have recently 'discovered' & like very much indeed. Anyway, the ladies ate it up, & a good time was had by all.

I seem to be coming out of my depressed mood & have ideas for several more short stories.

We hope to come up to Montreal in December, arriving on the morning of December 17 & staying till the 19th or 20th. Will you be there? I may also be coming up alone on Nov 28 for a meeting--but will let you know well in advance.

Love & kisses,
Des Pacey

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Dear Desmond,

Your letter and story in--for which much thanks. I haven’t had a free moment to read your story, and won’t until this weekend. This is just to let you know I’m glad you’re out of the feeling of depression and feel cheerful and vigorous enough to again write. I wanted to answer your earlier letter, but I had so many things to do, mainly to get a "waiver" from the Am Immigration¹, that I couldn’t sit down to it. The reading was a huge success, judging by all the reports of the event. All three of us were in "good voice" and Frank had enough Anglo-Saxon dignity to cover the rest of us. McRobbie² did, I thought, an excellent job of introducing the Canadian poets to an American audience, tho’ one or two complained he went on a bit too long. After the reading, a crowd of us went up to Gustafson’s small apartment where we tried to drink our assorted poisons standing on one another’s head. A perilous undertaking, but we succeeded. John Ciardi³ was there, looking like the poor man’s Auden. I had met him earlier in the evening, at the

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¹Desmond Pacey, "The New Neighbour," unpublished.
²Irving Layton, "De Bullion Street," Here and Now np.
³Layton, First Snow, Lake Achigan," In the Midst of My Fever np.
"Y" where he had come backstage to talk to us. He told me [he] had done a review of Red Carpet for SR. He said he liked the book very much, so I guess his review will say many kind things about it. Which all helps sales!

I hope you can make it down here this month. It seems a very long time since we’ve seen each other and had a good wrangle. You’ll get to know my little one, and I know you’ll fall in love with her as everyone else does. She’s my masterpiece! Had I my children with me I’d want for nothing—even though I’ve just been told by the Board of Education that my present fame has made me a danger to the school that employs me. It seems that like Socrates I am corrupting the young. Some idiotic parent complained to the director that his daughter had returned from school one day and said that "Mr Layton had told his class that the ancient Hebrews had made no contributions to science, art, or philosophy." Etc. Etc. And more such stupidities. What’s really behind it is my activity in the Teacher’s Federation. We have succeeded in bringing them before a Board of Conciliation, and since this has never before happened to them, they’re trying to scare the Federation executives by threatening them with the loss of their jobs. Well, you ought to have heard the dialogue between the Chairman of the B of E and myself. It took place in his office, he’s a lawyer, and his name is Joseph Caplan. An asslicker with talent and eager lips. The Head of the Board is a Mr Beutel, a clothing manufacturer who has as much concern for education as I for last year’s plans for snow removal. The other members of the Board are local merchants and real estateniks—as contemptible and cowardly a crew of pharase Jews as ever the prophets thundered against. The besetting sin of my people is respectability; add to this, sanctimoniousness and hypocrisy. It isn’t their soulless money-grubbing that makes my stomach turn sick; it’s their stinking moralism.

Well, Joseph Caplan had his ears pinned behind him. He must have thought Jeremiah had stumbled into his office. I told him to cut out the weasel words, and to remember that there were two kinds of Jews, his kind and my kind, and that the war between us would go on till Doomsday. I let him have it straight between the eyes, and I enjoyed myself hugely. My wit was razor—sharp and I slashed his poor cowardly veins into bleeding ribbons of offal. The bastards! After fifteen years of work and devotion to be told I was a menace to the school! And they were prepared to turn me out in the middle of the year, right now, without compensation and without the prospect of getting a teaching job. So much by way of gratitude or even ordinary decency. Remember this next time respectable Jews pull their holier—than—thou attitude on you, or they pat themselves on their pastrami—padded shoulders for their philanthropy or love of righteousness. I’m going to go after them in a way that’ll make Richler’s book seem like a kissing fairy-tale. This isn’t the first time I’ve had a run—in with my sanctimonious
brethren. It happened once before when I was a supervisor at the Hebrew Orphan’s Home and where I also got chucked out because I couldn’t look on and see poor helpless kids get the rough end of the rich man’s charity. In this city, Mr Bronfman, ex-smuggler of spirituous liquors, has every community effort sewn up from the Jewish General Hospital to the Public Library, and all the lesser plutocrats try to get as close to his behind as possible with their tongues outstretched. The stink of money and moralism is everywhere. To my way of thinking this sort of rubbish are not Jews. A Jew is one who practises justice and walks humbly with his Lord. That’s the only definition of a Jew I accept. Were a communist revolution to break out here tomorrow I’d be the first one to give the order for their extermination, myself seizing the rifle from someone in the firing-squad to see the job was done properly.

What the future holds for me I don’t know. Unless I can get another teaching job I shall probably leave for San Francisco where I have a brother who’s in the floor-covering business. It’s a very large concern and over the years he’s been urging me to come into it with him. I’ve turned his invitation down simply because money doesn’t interest me. But I have two wives and two children to think of besides myself, and I don’t wish to turn to freelance writing to support them. Two days ago I saw the Principal of Sir George Williams and told him that unless he found me a full-time position on the Staff of the College I was going to wipe the dust of this country off my feet and depart south. William Carlos Williams has practically assured me a position at Fairleigh Nicholson College in Nj and I don’t doubt that my present popularity in the USA could get me employment in one of the American Colleges. Sentiment and feelings of gratitude and loyalty would rather keep me here, but I’ll be forty-eight next March and I still have a lot of living to do. I told Principal Hall it’s his lookout to find me a position in his College (to think I have to hold a pistol to his head, considering all the deadbeats who are full-time professors, and that I’m without doubt the most popular lecturer on his staff!) or I’ll do a Bliss Carman. He told me he’d let me know in a couple of days. My faith in the intelligence and goodwill of my fellow men has never been too high--less now than ever; who wants independent-spirited men today?--but I’m prepared to be agreeably surprised...I’ll write again this Saturday.

Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

enclosure:"Reasonable Compassion" (review of Red Carpet)
Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 14 Nov. 1959.

1See 84.9.
2Kenneth McRobbie (b. 1929), British-born Professor of History at the University of Manitoba and poet (Jupiter C-- poems for a missile age 1958, and Eyes without a Face 1960).


5Joseph Caplan (b. 1904), Montreal barrister and solicitor, co-founder and past President Montreal Young Israel Congregation, Honorary President, Jewish Community of Montreal, and member of the Board of Education, Montreal United Talmud Torahs.

6Ben Beutel (b. 1902), men's clothing manufacturer, President United Talmud Torahs of Montreal (1945-), President, Council of Jewish Schools of Greater Montreal.

7The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz; see 281.

8Layton began working at the Hebrew Orphan's Home in the summer of 1926; less than a year later he was fired for organizing a protest against conditions at the orphanage.

9Samuel Bronfman (1889—1971), founder of Distillers Corporation Ltd in Montreal (1924), who merged it with Seagram and Sons in 1928 and then built it into the world's largest distilling firm; president of the Canadian Jewish Congress 1939-62.

10Hyman ("Harry") Latch (Lazarovitch) (1909-75).


12See 442.1.

13Bliss Carman (1861—1929), one of the "Confederation poets," was a native of Fredericton who spent his adult life (after 1886) in New England.

276.[pc] Friday [November 20, 1959pm]

Mary & I shall be coming up on Friday next (Nov 27), arriving Sat morning by train & staying till Sunday evening. I have a meeting Sat morning & Sat afternoon. Hope to be able to see you either Sat night or Sunday.

Looking for a letter from you. Have written another short story—-satire re phoney evangelistic campaign & its aftermath in Ontario village.1

Shall be staying again at the little Campus Hotel on McGill College Avenue.

Love & kisses,
Des Pacey

November 23, [1959]

Dear Irving,

Just a note, since I hope to be seeing you in a few days.

As you'll see, I've written another story & would like to discuss it & the previous one with you when we meet.

Terribly sorry to hear about your job troubles. For God's sake don't leave the country, we need you. For one thing, we'd like to do an Irving Layton number of The Fiddlehead soon—a review article of your Red Carpet, a group of your poems, perhaps even a Layton short story.¹ We must talk about this too.

Love,
Des Pacey

¹An Irving Layton number of The Fiddlehead did not appear, but Alden Nowlan reviewed A Red Carpet in The Fiddlehead 44 (Spring 1960); see 312.3.

December 9, 1959

Dear Irving,

Sorry to have been so long in writing to you since we [made] our visit to Montreal, but I've had a meeting of one sort or another every night.

It was very good to see you again and to meet Aviva, who quite lived up to her advance notices in looks, vivacity and general charm. I am sorry, however, that our time together was so limited. We just didn't get around to the full discussion I had hoped for. I think part of the trouble was that people drifted into your party at such odd times. Just as we were getting into a lively discussion, there would be a new arrival and we had to start all over again. And then of course we got onto that business about the function of the critic, which we have thrashed out so often before and on which neither of us has anything very new to say. Fundamentally I think we agree that people like Frye exaggerate the role of the critic, that even at his best the critic is subordinate to the creator, and that the best critics are themselves creative.

What I had hoped we might discuss, among other things, is the present state of Canadian letters. Are the appearances of new writers like Richler & Wiseman¹ & Cohen etc etc and of magazines like Prism², Can Lit, etc real signs of growth and awareness? I should also [have] liked to have discussed the value of the mythopoetic kind of poetry that the latest Reaney book, Jay Macpherson, Mandel & co. represent. Mandel once told me that though he felt Frye to be an excellent critic for critics, he was a menace to poetry because he got poets writing self-consciously his way. Did you see that crawling article by Reaney in a recent Poetry in which he said that the present situation in Canadian poetry is that we have one major critic & a bunch of minor poets, & that all the poets look to the critic (Frye) for paternal guidance?³ I think this is a lot of
nonsense, & that any poet who lets a critic tell him what or how to write is no true poet.

I've just finished reading (& reviewing for the Bulletin of the Humanities Association) The Living Tradition 2nd & 3rd series, edited by McDougall of Carleton. There's an excellent essay in it by A.J.M. Smith on D.C. Scott, quite a good one by Birney on Pratt, & a queer one by Reaney on Isabella Valancy Crawford in which he applies the mythopoeic method to her work. You'd enjoy the book, although some of the things Reaney says are enough to drive you up the wall.

I do hope we can get together again before long. Just yesterday, at a meeting of the Creative Arts Committee, I suggested that you be asked to come here & give a poetry reading in mid-January. There was enthusiastic agreement, & you should soon receive an official invitation. We could pay your expenses & a modest fee. I do hope you'll be able to come. I think the suggested dates are Jan 16 & 17, a weekend, when I thought you might be able to get away.

Yours sincerely,

Des Pacey

1 Adele Wiseman (b. 1928), Manitoba novelist (The Sacrifice 1956, Crackpot 1974), and playwright (Old Woman at Play 1978, Testimonial Dinner 1978).

2 The first issue of Prism: a Magazine of Contemporary Writing appeared in September 1959, founded and edited by Jan de Bruyn. Volume 4:1 appeared in the summer of 1964 with the title Prism international; it was now produced and edited by the Department of Creative Writing at UBC, with Earle Birney serving as editor-in-chief, followed by Jacob Zilber, Michael Bullock and George McWhirter. Beginning with volume 17, Prism international has been edited by a succession of MFA graduate students in the department holding annual editorial positions.

3 Reaney hailed Frye as the major figure in Canadian literature:
   Besides E.J. Pratt the one even greater literary fact in the Canadian poetic landscape is the criticism of Northrop Frye...
   So this is what the Canadian literary landscape looks like to me: a giant critical focus with some mythopoeic poets trying to live up to it. (188)


7 James Reaney, "Isabella Valancy Crawford," 268-88.
December 15, 1959

Dear Desmond,

Like yourself I was unhappy we didn’t have more time to ourselves, so that we might have filled in the big gaps left by letters with lots of laughter and friendship. Perhaps a quiet evening, with only two or three others dropping in, instead of the mob that did, might have been more sensible. I wonder what your son made of it all. If it gave him a healthy feeling of disgust for literary parties—they’re all so damned boring and dull—it will have served him well. Writers seem to leave their humanity behind them when they come to one of them. Talk-talk, so little fun, so little sense of enjoyment. I’m probably the worst offender of the lot, but believe me I’m trying very hard to reform.

As you say in your letter, the discussion might have developed into something useful had not people kept dropping in. The function of critics & criticism has been flogged to death by now: you and I certainly agree on all essentials. Poetic creativity, any kind of creativity, involves passion and imagination, while criticism is mainly an analytical activity. For me, this is the great divide, and I don’t like to see the dividing line blurred or ignored. Eli Mandel’s fear of Northrop Frye’s critical and pedagogical activities is of course shared by me—only I said it many years ago, and in letters to you. If my own experience has any significance for the cultural (sic) history of this country, here is where it lies. Had I taken Frye’s strictures seriously, or for that matter, A.J.M. Smith’s, I should have folded up years ago. Luckily, I felt their criticism was hostile to the Canadian evolving experience, and was so because it was a variant of the Brahmanism of the New England of the ’90s of the last century. This is going to be an abiding problem in this country’s intellectual life because of the deep division which exists here between the elite and the mass media-fed philistines. The pallid excretions of Reaney and Macpherson, poems totally unrelated to the contemporary world, obscure university-corridor jokes in verse, the intellectual arrogance of academic sterility and fear of life, a desiccation of the emotions and finally Silence, so I see the evolution of that wing of Canadian poetry. Mandel is himself a victim of Frye’s methods; fortunately for him, he has the good sense to see it, and to fight it. But whether, living in an academic atmosphere, surrounded always by books, and constantly enveloping the great names in professorial spittle till they become nothing but thick, comforting wads of gum which he transfers from one side of his mouth to the other (vide Dudek’s recent article on Cndn poetry in Culture) he can still retain the freshness and the emotional vigour which are the roots of poetry is very, very doubtful. The sad thing about Mandel is that his profession is better than his practice: that he feels Reaney and Miss Mac are on the wrong track (rhyme unintentional) while these two, leaning on Frye, believe that the new Canadian highway of poetry is going to march
straight through their spindly legs. Yes, I saw Reaney’s article in Poetry and had the same feelings and thoughts about it as you have. He’s simply out of touch with events, and his remarks must have struck his American readers as though they had been made by a bewildered Martian visitor. They struck me that way, and I think I have enough American contacts and correspondents to be able to speak for them also.

Incidentally, you may have seen Ls D’s review of Red Carpet in this last number of Delta in which he includes me along with R and M in the "school of Frye." I am thinking of writing an essay on Louis’ recent criticism since no one else seems willing to tackle it. There’s the whole trouble with our intellectual life: whatever is really important and immediate, gets completely ignored while the critics spend their precious time on academic irrelevancies. There isn’t a younger poet I’ve talked to that doesn’t resent bitterly Dudek’s characterization of them as "neurotic", "disorganized", "dilettante", "exhibitionistic", etc, etc—ad nauseam; but so far, not one of the learned critical community has given this turncoat and lucky eunuch the drubbing he deserves. It is apparent he is writing out of the psychopathology of envy and impotency, envy not only of me, but with his Peer Gyntish complex, envy of any young poet like Hine or Cohen who seems to be shouldering him out of the way. Why don’t you expose him?—that’s your job as a critic, and that should be Frye’s: that, I hold, is the first and foremost job of any critic—to trim the lamp, but to let the flame of inspiration and creativity glow brighter and fiercer than ever. His first job is to hit on the head—good & hard—anyone who wishes to extinguish it, whatever his doctrinaire rationalizations might be. The enemies of the life of the spirit are always with us. In my time I’ve seen several of them at close range. They always exhibit the same traits: emotional exhaustion; fear of life; envy; hatred of the new; and always they dress up their despicable attitudes to look like wisdom, Olympian serenity. Faugh, I hate their crawling breed and I would as soon step upon one of them as upon a dung-beetle.

When D says I decided years ago I was a "major poet", he is simply telling a "major whopper". No one, not even since Smith’s article on me, has ever heard me say these words. No one. What I did tell Louis was that I ought to consider himself as potentially a major poet, that any poet ought to, for in that case, he might at least become a "minor one". I told him that under the most amusing circumstances, but I haven’t the time to go into that now. Some day when we see each other, and you remind me of it, I’ll tell you what those circumstances were.

The Dudekian thesis is that my "fearful" personality has terrified the Canadian critics into acclaiming my work. Are you "terrified" by it? Can you imagine Frye being terrified by it? Or Smith? Is my personality so "fearful"? Poor Louis, his one real experience of a living human being,
and he must shake and shiver for it for the rest of his life! I wonder, though, what fairytales he tells himself to explain the regard of American critics and poets for my work: Ezra Pound, Kenneth Rexroth, John Ciardi, Williams, Eckman, Kenner, and of English ones such as Roy Fuller, Hugh McDiarmid, George Barker. Has my "fearful" personality operating at a distance & through ether waves also extracted from them a terrified assent? I can't imagine what he'd say if anyone asked him!

The truth is, that like my late brother-in-law John Sutherland, LD has gone back on everything he once felt to be true. Life, or rather inborn cowardice, his own weakness of will, or lack of robustness, has trapped him and now all that he can do is squirm and make hideous grimaces as he does so, projecting upon myself a distorted Nietzscheanism he'd like to possess, and a hatred for myself because he doesn't. It's an interesting process to watch, and because of our former friendship I feel a great deal of compassion for him. He deserved a kinder fate. As I wrote him in a recent note: "One might have known it would all end up like this: I publishing my Collected Poems and receiving international acclaim for it, and you writing a sad, savage, and silly review of it." If I receive the invitation to give a reading from the Creative Arts Committee I shall very gladly accept it. For many reasons I'd be glad to, but mostly because it would give me another chance to be with you and Mary, and to meet your family.

Love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving

1Philip, who was a student at McGill (see 263).

2The tradition of old, respected families who, because of wealth and social position, wielded considerable political power; also used to denote the attitude of intellectual or social aloofness thereby displayed.


4"Now a member of the 'School of Frye' (Milton Wilson's phrase), his poetry is an imposing charnel-house of interlocking symbols and erotund sentences."

5Layton alludes to the protagonist of Henrik Ibsen's Peer Gynt (1867), a contradictory poetic character who confuses himself with legendary heroes so as to become "a legend in his own mind."

6Layton refers to Dudek's remark:
Some years ago Layton decided that he was a "major poet"--about 1953 as I recall--and he has since sold this idea to his critics. Granted he is a very forceful, even fearful personality, there is no excuse for indulgence of a poet's major weakness (17).
Louis Dudek, "Layton on the Carpet."
Pound’s letter to Layton; see 5.41.

Layton had appeared with Rexroth on Fighting Words; I can find no record of a review or criticism of Layton by him.


Williams’ first letter to Layton; see 5.40.

Williams, letter to Irving Layton, 19 and 21 Mar. 1956, Irving Layton Collection, Concordia University.


Frederick Eckman, rev. of Cerberus, Golden Goose 6 (Sept. 53): 84-85.

Eckman, rev. of The Improved Binoculars, Poetry 90 (Sept. 57): 386.


Kenner’s review of A Laughter in the Mind; see 267.10.

Kenner’s correspondence to Layton continues after the letter cited above (ie see 169.4), which was quoted on the dust jacket of The Bull Calf; Kenner had also included Layton in his anthology The Art of Poetry: Best Articles and Poems of 1958 (see 169.6), and in a June 1958 article in Poetry (Chicago) had listed Layton as one of the poets doing the most exciting works in the 1950s.

Puller’s review of A Red Carpet; see 268.5.

I have been unable to find any criticism of Layton by these British poets, but a recurrent Layton project was a British edition of his poems with a foreword by a leading British poet (see 421.3).

Irving Layton, letter to Louis Dudek, 12 December 1959 Dudek Papers, National Archives of Canada.

December 23, 1959

Dear Desmond,

[At the end of each year I like to sum up what I’ve learned from people and events. And there was no better time to do it than when I was on my back letting my rump heal. Perhaps some of the pain & discomfort got into the following; if so, please forgive.]

I’m writing these "Reflections at the End of a Year" from a hospital bed where I’m recovering from a minor operation—a fistula on my bum. Since I’ve often celebrated that part of the anatomy, there’s a certain ironic justice in my having a large chunk of my left buttock torn out. The surgeon says I’ll be left with a permanent smile in that region; and somehow the idea delights me. I like symbols, and find them everywhere. This is surely symbolic: if one ought to smile at the world, that’s the proper place for the
smile to appear: hidden, unchanging, ineffaceable. Just think of it--no matter how sullenly I may frown at the shape and direction of things, my smiling contradictory behind will be putting a good face on them. What the masks of comedy and tragedy did for Greek drama, my face and my ass will now do for me.

Firstly then, some minor Reflections, appetizers:

a. If the Beatniks have done nothing else, they've at least put the Square on the defensive. In a way they can be credited with having effected a kind of small revolution. The other evening, I heard someone actually apologizing for working in a Brokerage House. A year ago it would never have come into his mind that there was anything shameful in what he was doing.

b. The difference between poetry and literature is the same as that between coupling and a description of it in a sex manual. And as in the love act, the genius of poetry lies in the perfect tact with which opposites are reconciled: those of altruism and selfishness, victory and defeat, death and immortality. Yes, even love and hate, the one feeding on the other, until both are extinguished in the final spasm of ecstasy. And what about mind and body, that most difficult and stubborn pair of all the antinomies to reconcile? For in surrendering or dissolving, the one can only become the despised victim of the other. In every love encounter a part of each of them is mutilated, is torn out and dies. But the part that remains, as if by a pruning, flourishes more vigorously, more brightly and fruitfully than before. It is this phenomenon which some people call soul or spirit. To create: that is to die again and again. Every poem is a copulation with the world--the discerning critic will look for what died to produce it.

c. The Jews, by reducing a plurality of gods to one god, paved the way for atheism. That is their greatest historical achievement. A ‘believing’ Jew is to me an anomaly. I find it difficult to like him or to credit him with both intelligence and sincerity; for if he is sincere, I think him unintelligent; and if he’s intelligent, I think he is insincere. It is said there are more atheists proportionately in Israel than in any other country in the world, not excepting the Soviet Union. That’s as it should be; for the region which first saw the birth of Judaic monotheism, should also be the first to herald its dissolution. Out of Zion...If there is a God, I hope he appreciates the comedy he himself helped to write. True, it was a strange comedy--one that produced tears instead of laughter, but these divine comedies must be judged differently, on other grounds than our own.

d. I should like to write a play and call it Brutus. Louis Dudek would play the lead role. He has the nameless discontent of Brutus, and he is stricter with the same seemingly inexplicable moodiness. Nothing pleases him. Though ambitious, it is not of the vaulting kind as that of Cassius; though envious, he is not as mean-spirited as
Casca. What is it then that makes every person who meets him for the first time, sense a great unhappiness in his soul, a restless melancholy dissatisfaction with himself and with the world around him? It looks out at you from his eyes, from his sad little smile too weary to complete itself. Who but the angels have ever heard him laugh full-throatedly from the belly, like a peasant? Once upon a time they did. But with each year that passed, the laugh grew thinner and thinner (as did the hair on his head. What comic spirit or fatality is at work to make professors look like professors?) Now his laugh reminds one of the rattle of a solitary pea in an autumn pod; and when he smiles it is as if the feeble sun had momentarily lit up the same pod's unfruitful greenness. But to return to my play. Louis, a Brutus. Why? Because he knows prophetically that failure lies within him like a disease of the blood or the bones. He lacks the energy to overcome the ravages of his introspection, except as with Brutus, by a sudden forcing of the will. And just as Brutus was obsessed with the true nature of greatness, Dudek is equally obsessed with the nature of genius. It is this obsession that ennobles both his envy and his ambition, throws a kind of melancholy greatness over him and his brooding self-concern. Brutus is an everlasting type and Shakespeare has portrayed him superbly. It is the beautiful and intriguing mask that psychic weakness always puts on; or if you prefer, it is a name for a noble self-love too proud to ask for suffrages. Brutus is the eternal vice-president.

Now for some major reflections:

A. History is ever unkind to the defeated. Today who is really exercised about Hungary or the fifteen million kulaks Stalin eliminated in his brutal drive to collective agriculture in the USSR? We must go deeper, however. Since the Soviet Union represents the new social forces in the womb of the old order, all that she did will be forgiven her, as in time even Stalin's crimes will be forgiven. You say, no. Well then, forgotten; which is posterity's way of forgiving. It is this insight into History's amnesia which turned the cultivated Frederick who in his youth loved poetry and French belles-lettres into the cynic and realist that grabbed Silesia and laid the foundation for the future Germany. Then there's the example of the enlightened Catherine of Russia who took the Sea of Asia from the Turks. Plato and Shakespeare and in our century, Bernard Shaw, are the only writers of genius to have concerned themselves profoundly with the relation between "poetry" and "power". It is this concern which makes their writings still readable and profitable. In a small way, my own work has dealt with the same awful relation, but what critic has so far even suspected it? It is at this point that good and evil, time and eternity, means and ends, intersect. It is this point of intersection, no Eliotic still centre, that increasingly engages the best minds and the most vigorous spirits of our age. Alongside these writers, everybody else
appears tepid, parochial, irrelevant and of no serious account.

B. Wanted in Canada: a really profound Marxist thinker. The thinness of our intellectual life, its provincialism and irrelevancy, are the consequences of the fact that Marxist thought and more important, Marxist feeling have never taken strong root here. Pacifism, pragmatism, and tolerance, these are our virtues—-attractive, but not heroic; never the virtues of a vigorous, dynamic country or nation making history. Canada too is a kind of Brutus, yearning for a greatness both geography and history have denied her. The futile dream, the unrealizable wish, is the real source—neither the North, nor the inhospitality of Nature—of our writers’ melancholy and introspectiveness. It is not encouraging to know and feel oneself peripheral and irrelevant. The Jews were peripheral, but never irrelevant. That is the dynamic paradox of their history. What the Jews thought and did mattered, what Canadians do and think, doesn’t.

(Humorous interlude: as one who is both a Cndn and a Jew, what I do and think both matters and doesn’t. Life is full of paradoxes!).

C. America and the West are in for a bad time of it. Our leaders and publicists will not tell us, either because they don’t know, or because knowing they are determined to put a good face on the matter. For our society, for our bourgeois-Christian civilization based on inequality and exploitation, on humbug, cant and hypocrisy, the sands are running out. Who takes our political leaders seriously nowadays? On them and all they do a faint air of ridicule attaches itself, as though unknown to themselves—-so to speak, innocently—they were playing serious roles in a huge comedy. (Eisenhower’s trip—rosettes on a corpse.) Surely it is no accident that all the West’s leaders are old men. Our decaying social system fears vitality, imagination, youth. Everything is old, old, and mouldy. All our strength is used in trying to remain alive; like a sick man feverishly gulping down his vitamin pills. In every field, selfish and decrepit men are sitting on the lid, trying desperately to squeeze their spindly bodies together to keep the new vital forces from unseating them. Our educational system is a hypocritical shambles tied securely to the industrial needs of a wasteful and exploitative capitalism. The intelligent student very soon learns to see beyond his professor’s foggy idealism, gives an internal Bronx cheer, and begins asking the one important question that will concern him for the rest of his life: "What’s in it for me?" Our democratic parliaments, assemblies etc are absurd talking shops to make certain that protest and criticism will waste itself in the exercise of the glottis and larynx, and that nothing is done to unseat the beneficiaries of the existing system or their ignorant or cowardly legmen in School, Church and Press. More than ever, I see violence as the surgical knife that will remove this draining social
fistula—in the next decade the USA will be rocked by industrial and political conflicts, by staggering social explosions—her intellectual and spiritual poverty will be laid bare for everyone to see. Both geographically and historically, America is not too far from Cuba. The "Social Revolution" is on the march everywhere; is in fact, right on America’s doorstep, the Caribbean. In time it will envelop the USA itself, the last holdout of an outmoded economic order. My image for this America—the glittering dome of the Capitol as an enormous bubble of blood.

D. Canada’s role in the future, will be confined to holding the ring between the giant contestants while the Soviet Union knocks the United States silly; and to shouting encouraging words in English each time the latter is knocked on his back. Hardly a heroic or vigorous role for any country to play, but then Destiny originally intended this place for Eskimos and Algonquins; the price we must pay for our interference with her wise plans is to see ourselves a nation of bacon-fed second-raters, our most passionate spirits and alert minds decamping from here as early as they can. In a large measure, the vapourings of our intellectuals— their unreality, provincialism, and (again I must use this word) their irrelevancy stems from the fact that Canada has no intellectual middle-class of sociologists, historians, economists, publicists, etc: they’ve all emigrated to the States or elsewhere. It’s our miserable fate to end a fashion instead of beginning one. By the time Kierkegaard has been flogged to death everywhere else, our critics are still minutely inspecting the poems of Eliot and Auden for traces of him in their thin bloodstreams. What a shock to their delicate nervous systems these critics would get if they were to read some contemporary Polish, Hungarian, Yiddish or Yugoslav poetry! Come to think of it they wouldn’t—they couldn’t even understand what these poets were saying. A different world of feeling and thinking is theirs for which Eliot et al, alas, have not prepared them: a relevant world—there’s that word again.

E. Wanted: a Canadian Castro who’ll nationalize American holdings and end our debt slavery to American trusts and corporations. If we had freedom of will, if we weren’t cursed by our geography and history into a position of dependent mediocrity, we’d invite our northern neighbour to lend us some of his brains in education, economics, planning, etc, thereby initiating some kind of dynamic interaction between their culture and world and our own very different ones. This may still happen in some modest way; is in fact, happening. But for the most part, I think we’re condemned to watch the United States rot and stink, and we—bourgeois and Christian to the bitter end—to rot and stink with them.

F. There will be no 3rd world war. Russian victory is a bloodless one, won not on the battlefield but on the blackboard. Look at her students, and then take a good look
at ours: rotten before they are ripe. Rotten with cynicism, defeatism, aimlessness. Consider the Russian's attitude towards books and men of learning and spirit, and then think what our own is like. Isaiah and Jefferson told us, but we thought ourselves wiser than they--those innocents!--those who won't read history are condemned to repeat it.\(^7\)

G. When I applauded the Suez adventure, I did so thinking the West was at last beginning to rouse itself from its torpor, was at last embarking upon a difficult but necessary, a Periclean\(^8\) course of action. Now I see it was not the upsurging vitality of a recovering patient, but the last spasm of a dying one. Russia, with less moral justification, could do what she did in Hungary and get away with it. The West could not. Future historians will mark this as the symbolic revelation of our weakness and decline, and of Russia's growing ascendancy. Since then, it is clear we have been on the receiving end of every one of Russia's well-delivered punches--there are many more in store for us! The West has been kicked out forcibly from the Middle East, Cyprus, parts of Africa, and now from the Caribbean and South America. Our statesmen can pass all the resolutions in the world condemning the Russian part in the Hungarian revolt, it does not change or whittle down by one iota the significance of the recent meeting of South American women delegations who expressed their approval of the position of women in the Soviet Union (New York Times: December 22, 1959)\(^9\)--that increasingly Castro and the SA revolutionaries are looking to Russia for help.

H. Wanted: clarity of thought, an end to nauseating superficialities, to hysteria masquerading itself as passion and intensity, ignorant indifference palming itself off as Olympian serenity--the latter a peculiarly Canadian temptation, owing to the isolation of our mental elite. Here, Hugh MacLennan is considered an important novelist, and my poem "The Caged Bird" (perhaps the profoundest poem to come out of the recent war) is judged by one critic (Desmond Pacey) something Archibald Lampman might have done because. forsooth. like his "Heat" it deals with the antinomies of existence.\(^10\) It never seems to have entered his mind that my antinomies are those History makes and not the genteel ones of water and earth, heat and cold, etc, etc, that, in brief, "The Caged Bird" has the scope and angst of contemporary history in it, that the feeling, as well as the idea, in the poem is something a contemporary European would instantly recognize as real and immediate. But Desmond Pacey, our one Johnsonian critic, has one great advantage over all our critics--an immeasurable fund of common sense and a resolute will not to be taken in by intellectual fads and fancies. If only he'd read ( or re-read) Trotsky's "Literature & Revolution."\(^{11}\)

\(^{1}\) Layton alludes to the protagonists of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. 
2Stalin forced the uncooperative Russian peasants (kulaks) to amalgamate into state farms through a policy of mass arrest, execution, exile, and concentration camps; estimates of those killed in this manner range from ten to twenty million.

3Frederick II (Frederick the Great) (1712—86); King of Prussia (1740—86), an enlightened absolute monarch who conquered Silesia 1740—45 and expanded Prussia's territory.

4Catherine II (Catherine the Great) (1729—96), Empress of Russia (1762—96), a disciple of the Encyclopedists, she launched a campaign in 1779 to expel the Turks from Europe and restore the Byzantine empire.

5Eliot's version of Joyce's "epiphany", as expressed in the Four Quartets, the "still centre" encodes his belief in moments in which the mind may transcend the limitations of time and enter a new mode of being beyond time.

6At the time of the announcement of Kruschev's visit to the United States (August 3; see 266), it was simultaneously announced that Eisenhower would visit the Soviet Union later in the autumn; during Kruschev's visit it was announced that Eisenhower's visit would be postponed until the Spring.


8An allusion to Pericles (c. 495-429 B.C.), Athenian statesman, general and orator, renowned for democratic reforms in the Golden Age of Athens as the period of his ascendancy came to be known. Although he ended the Persian wars his decision to intervene in the war between Corcyra and Corinth was a prelude to the Peloponnesian War.


10See 248.


281. January 5, 1960

Dear Irving,

You will think I am being very cavalier about answering your letters, & indeed I am. I became very lazy over the holidays & did virtually nothing. The trouble was that I was terribly busy marking exam papers up until the day before Christmas, & that I was then plunged into a most exhausting round of parties. Starting Christmas Eve, Mary & I were out to a party every night until this past Sunday, & as most of these parties went on until two or three in the morning we weren't able to do anything next day except prepare for the next party! We've never had such a whirl of social gaiety before, & I shouldn't mind if we never had it again. It just happened that a lot of people owed us invitations, & that they all decided to have Christmas parties, and everything came together. I found by the end that my immunity to alcohol was becoming so strong that only about a quart of hard liquor had any effect on me whatever.
I am laying off the stuff completely for a while, in the hope of regaining a taste for it.

The part of the holiday I enjoyed most were the afternoons. We had wonderful weather & lots of snow, so almost every day Mary & I & the kids went skiing and/or tobogging. I found that a great way of getting over a hangover.

Are you coming here on the 16th? I haven't seen Whalen to ask if he has heard from you, & you don't mention your visit in either of your recent letters, so I am beginning to wonder. Several people--students & staff alike--stopped me on the campus this morning to ask me if you were coming, & I wasn't able to tell them. I do hope you are. I am sure we shall be able to have a wonderful time.

Now for your letters. I feel sorry for Dudek--his attacks on you & on Cogswell (in Can Lit) are so obviously sour grapes. I doubt whether it is necessary for anyone to point this out either privately or publicly--it is so obvious to us all, & it must be to him as well. And he does the same sort of thing with me in his Culture article, "The Transition in CP", where he slights me & yet appropriates all my ideas. That article is badly written, very illogical, & when it does make sense simply puts in oversimplified form generalizations borrowed from Creative Writing and 10 CP. I think that rather than blast the guy we should all hope that somehow he will find a way out of his present frustration & impotence. I suspect his wife (who I thought was very rude to you at your house that night) is having a bad influence on him, stirring up in him envy & a sense of guilt. It's hard to see where he can go from here--he'll never make a critic, for he hasn't the clarity of mind or the patience for it; and he's obviously run out of steam as a poet. Perhaps he could write a sad, disillusioned novel about the frustrated poet in Montreal. By the way, I did read Richler's latest novel on the holidays, & enjoyed it very much. It makes a Montreal boyhood very real; the latter part is less successful, but still honest, amusing & pathetic.

Sorry about the fistula on your bum--though I love the idea of your half-assed smile!

Your "Reflections" are very good--they certainly should be published. Certainly they are among the wisest & most profound things I have read in a long while.

I'm late for lunch now, & have a lecture right afterwards--so must run. More later--& do come down here!

Love,
Des P

1 Louis Dudek, "Two Ancients among the Moderns," (rev. of The Wayward Queen by George Walton and Descent from Eden by Fred Cogswell) Canadian Literature 2 (autumn 1959): 77-79.

2 Pacey refers to passages in Dudek's article such as: this specific criticism becomes a cannonade against Canadian poets in Desmond Pacey's Creative Writing in Canada: Mair's strength "resides almost wholly" in a
capacity to "observe and describe the minute details of landscape." Roberts, "when he is content to describe Nature," is at his best. Campbell is too rarely "content simply to paint the surface of nature". Even among the twentieth century group, Pratt "has little power of abstract thought"; Anderson is "at his best when he is content merely to sing to describe a scene". (286)

Louis Dudek, "The Transition in Canadian Poetry;" see 278.3.


282. January 5, 1960

Dear Desmond,

I guess you haven’t recovered from the Christmas and New Year’s celebration—still no letter from you. This is just to let you know I heard from Mr Whalen,2 and I answered his letter from a hospital bed, but I’ve not heard from him again. Is the reading still on? If so, what are the arrangements?

On the first of this month, I finished a 3,000 word article called "The Case of L.D."3 It’ll be published in the forthcoming first issue of The Moment,4 edited by Al Purdy and Milton Acorn.5 Since you chaps won’t take his pants off, I had to, and it’s the scorchiest undressing this country has ever seen. He’s had it coming to him a long time. ever since December 1958 when I first saw his article "Patterns in Recent Canadian Poetry" in Culture.6 What makes the illuminati here so reluctant to engage in controversy? Louis D has been spoiling for a fight for a long time, but so far no one has stepped up to him. To give him his due, he’s concerned with live, real, and immediate issues—and that’s the last thing our pundits wish to concern themselves with. This isn’t a dig only at you (I enjoyed your Richardson essay—the liveliest bit of writing you’ve done in a long time) but damn it all, when are you fellows going to fight about something important? LD’s views are important—make no mistake about that: in the long run—or is it the short run—a lot more important than Frve’s or yours. That’s because he’s a live poet talking about his craft. When are you bloodless academics going to wake up to this fact?

Imagine an important American poet writing about the craft of poetry, and being treated with this kind of gubernatorial silence. You people have learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

Love,

Irving

1Misdated 1959.

2Hugh J. Whalen, Professor of Economics and Political Science at the University of New Brunswick, chairman of UNB’s Creative Arts Committee 1960-61.

The Moment was a mimeographed poetry magazine based in Toronto, edited by Milton Acorn and Al Purdy (numbers 1-5) and by Acorn and Gwendolyn Mcewen Acorn (numbers 6 & 7).


See 205.3.

283. January 6, 1960
Dear Irving,

Your letter of Jan 5 just in, & I hasten to tell you that the reading is on & is being publicized. I just heard this morning.

The arrangement as I understand it is that you arrive here Saturday morning, & read your poems in the Art Centre that night. I suggested that your formal commitment be limited to that. I presume that you’ll be arriving by train & leaving Sunday night by train. If you would like to stay at our house, we should be delighted. If, on the other hand, you feel you would prefer the quiet & privacy of a room in the hotel, the best one is the Lord Beaverbrook Hotel. In any case I’ll meet you at the train Saturday morning, & we can then look around the university, have lunch together, a good walk or drive in the afternoon, & so on. We can have a party at our house after the reading & we can have further confabulations on Sunday. It’s all very exciting & we’re looking forward to it immensely.

You’ll by now probably have my letter discussing Dudek et al. I’m sure you’ve quite demolished him in your article. I could answer your strictures about academic non-involvement, but won’t—we’ll discuss it when we meet. Glad you liked the Richardson article—I think I told you I found it terribly dull reading—I hope you’re right & I’m wrong.

All the best. in haste.

Des Pacey

1Misdated "Wed Jan 7? 1960".

284. January 7, 1960
Dear Desmond,

I want to apologize for the nasty-tempered letter I sent you yesterday. My behind has been acting up nights, and I haven’t had a decent sleep for a long time. My temper has been terribly peevish—so do forgive the rather splenetic outburst against you and the critics for not going after LD’s hide. Mind you, I still think you ought to but I might have phrased the matter more kindly. As you say in your letter, Dudek is too unclear in his thinking to succeed as a critic; his Transition article was even worse than the Patterns one. But in all fairness to him, he deserves an
answer; one should never overlook the views of a poet on
poetry. Well, I’ve written something called “The Case of
L.D.: A Mock Heroic Essay”\(^2\), which has some good moments in
it, though it’s by no means adequate. I’m not a scholar,
only am I a critic. Still, I think I do put my finger on
some of his current blindnesses, and if he listens to me he
might get redeemed for poetry. With Stephanie by his side,
however... I’ve also written a parody of his En México
manner. It’s amusing, I think. It’s called “Mexico, As
Seen By Louis the Lip”\(^3\). Both pieces will appear in The
Moment, whose expected publication date is about two weeks
from now.

You are pulling my leg when you say my “Reflections"
are profound enough to be published, they’re not written for
that purpose, and I don’t think they’re that good. I wrote
them for the same reason that we talk—to relieve myself
from tension. I find speaking and writing wonderful
therapy. I suppose you do too. Please read me with a large
grain of salt, especially when I seem to you uppish and
conceited. When I write you, I’m going to get the Nobel
Prize, I just want you to understand by that that I don’t
intend to rest on my laurels, but to go on working damn hard
at my poetry. I think you know me well enough by now to
know prizes and recognition don’t mean too much to me. What
I want most is the enjoyment of creating. I’ve just about
decided to take a year off from all teaching duties and
write enough short stories to bring out a volume of them.
And then perhaps later a novel. After that, I’ll return to
poetry, which is my real love, and write the poems of an
aging pagan Hebrew. You see, don’t you, I’m full of plans.

Mr Whalen hasn’t communicated with me again. As I
wrote you in my last letter, I replied to his invitation
from the hospital. I hope my letter didn’t go astray. Will
you do me a favour and check with him, and let me know by
return mail—or ask him to—what the arrangements are.
Seeing you and Mary again will be great fun. We’ll have the
chance to really talk over a great many things. Well, my
class has just about finished its assignment. It’s been a
pleasure talking to you, so mellowly and peaceably. You’re
a great good man, Desmond. Love to Mary.

Love,
Irving

\(^1\)Misdated 1959.

\(^2\)See 281.3.

\(^3\)Irving Layton, "Mexico as Seen by Looie the Lip," Moment 1 (1960): 8. Re-published as
"Mexico as Seen by the Reverent Dudek," in The Laughing Rooster 50.
Dear Irving,

Just a hasty note to tell you how much I enjoyed your visit here. It was grand to have you and everybody was delighted by your reading. Seldom have I spent as gay & exciting a weekend.

Thank you for helping me revise the children's verse. I've done some further revision on my own and I think the joint result has been a real improvement.

I enclose Tuesday's Brunswickan with a brief note on your visit. Fairbairn's column on you will appear Friday.

Love,
Des


1Misdated "Wednesday January 19"
2Pacey was editing the collected edition of his children's verse—see 580.1.
4David Fairbairn (b. 1940), Brunswickan columnist and student at the University of New Brunswick 1957-61.

286. January 24, 1960
Dear Desmond,

When I returned I had to plunge into two sets of exam papers lying on my table to be corrected—also on Thursday I gave another talk and reading before a newly-formed literary group in the suburb of St Laurent. I’ve been on the go all week; no let up at all. You and Mary and the kids were wonderful. I’ll never spend a more enjoyable or a more exhilarating week-end. It’s hard to believe a week has already gone by, that blizzard and Beaverbrook and Alfred Bailey are all rolled up in the past, along with Burns fumbling frosty-fingered at his fly.

Eli Mandel met me at the station, and we had an hour’s talk together over a cup of coffee. He’s put on some weight and looks that much better for it. He said he’s doing a long article on recent Canadian poetry for the QQ and he’s planning to write a longish essay on the idea behind my poems for Canadian Literature. He asked me to read some poems and talk about them for the forthcoming Humanities meeting at Kingston. The date he mentioned was, I think, June 16th. Will you attend? I hope so. Reaney, George Johnston, and Dudek have also been asked to read poems.
Mandel seems to think that the four of us represent divergent or, at any rate, different schools of poetry. I wonder whether we do. For myself, I think I'm a lyricist, not an ideologue: human life and history strike me as too plainly irrational to allow anyone the folly of a coherent absolutism. Poetry laughs at all blueprints, charts, diagrams; scatters categories as if they were leaves in autumn. It asks only two questions, is it interesting, is it genuine; and sometimes only the first. That's why moralists, Platonic statesmen, and perspiring sociologists are uneasy in the presence of poetry.

I'm glad you found my suggestions for your book useful. I had never seen any of your children's verse, and it came as a surprise to me to see how well you wrote them. A large family, I suppose, makes a wonderful incentive. It was probably presumptuous for me to advise you at all, since I've never written any. But I think I'm right about children being sadistic, amoral nazis, and about the tendency of adults to lecture them into virtue. Throw logic out; pick up a handful of dust and fling it into the wind. If you go after the veering grains you'll find the children following behind you. It's a mistake adults often make to think they're interested in far-off places or exotic happenings; they're a lot more interested in the odd and terrifying world inside them.

I took your advice and spoke to Neil Compton who heads the English department at Sir George Williams. He said he'd do everything he could, but he also added the ominous note that Principal Hall hadn't even spoken to him concerning my application. I wonder why he didn't. I think I can guess now why I haven't heard from him—he very likely doesn't wish to put it down in writing that he can't (won't, is the more just word) find anything for me at the College. When I saw him, I made it clear to him that I was going to explore every possibility of staying in this country, so that if I left no one would be able to say I had done a Bliss Carman after I had picked up a number of prizes. They could easily make room for me at Sir GW. Compton suggested I might give a course in great European books, similar to the one Dudek now gives at McGill. Another course would be nineteenth century English and Am Literature. Yes, if the will were not lacking, Hall could put me on the staff tomorrow, but I gather he's a prudish sort who dislikes my writing, and doesn't approve [of] my opinions on sex, religion, and capitalism. But Compton sd he was going to talk to him this coming Tuesday: one way or the other I ought to know where I stand before another wk goes by. If I were sure of a position I'd take the whole next year off and write furiously. Since I haven't touched the Canada Council money I'll be able to do it. I may do it in any case.

How is Mary? I'm sorry I didn't have more time to talk with her. I don't know which delighted me more—her painting or her cooking. Both are very good. Give my love
to her and to your children. Let me say once more—it was wonderful being with you!

Hugs, Irving


2A bronze monument to New Brunswick’s benefactor Lord Beaverbrook stands in Officer’s Square in downtown Fredericton. Sculpted by Malta’s Vincent Apap, it was unveiled on August 28, 1957.

3A monument to Robert Burns sculpted by Robert Stevenson of Glasgow and raised by the Fredericton Society of Saint Andrew, stands on the Green beside the art gallery in Fredericton. The poet’s left hand rests on his thigh.


5Mandel did not publish an article on Layton in Canadian Literature, but this idea may have led to his book Irving Layton (Toronto: Forum House, 1969).

6Readings by Writers: Poems Read at the Annual Meeting of the Humanities Association of Canada at Queen’s University, Kingston, 6-8 June 1960 (Kingston, 1960).

February 1, 1960

Dear Irving,

Enjoyed seeing you and Miriam on Fighting Words last night.1 You are certainly leading a busy life these days, aren’t you? I thought you were substantially right in your views last night, but a bit too voluble—you hardly gave the others a chance! I agree that Canadian intellectuals are less given to public controversy than the French & English, but I think one big reason that no one mentioned (& this bedevils our literature as well as our intellectual life generally) is the lack of a centre. We have no Paris nor London. I may give a talk in Fredericton or Saint John which is quite controversial, but you won’t hear of it in Montreal. Sometimes we write letters to the Fredericton Daily Gleaner—but no one outside New Brunswick is aware of them. Of course we are peculiarly isolated here—but surely much the same is true even of Montreal & Toronto. If we had a single newspaper which we all read, & which reported news of the whole country, we might be aware of much more controversy than we’re aware of at the moment. When Stephen Spender writes a letter to The Times, everyone in England quickly hears about it—but would this be true in Canada if you wrote to the Globe & Mail or the Gazette? The nearest thing we have to a national centre of controversy is The Canadian Forum, & since it appears only at monthly intervals most of the heat has cooled before the next issue is ready.

Your visit here is still being talked about with great pleasure. We voted the other day to send you an additional $50 from the Creative Arts Committee—I hope you got it. I also enclose a column on you by Carol MacPherson2, the girl who read the short story about the visit to the carnival
that Sunday afternoon in the Art Centre. Either she or the typographer made a few boners, but on the whole it's a good report, I think.

By the way, this is Winter Carnival week at UNB, and as one of the three judges of the Carnival Queen I'm involved in many of the functions. At the moment I can't make up my mind between a blonde with a bosom like Jayne Mansfield's and a brunette with legs like Marlene Dietrich's. I may have to investigate the middle regions to reach a conclusion!

I shall have to go to Kingston in June for the Royal Society, & shall probably stay for some other meetings. Whether or not I shall be able to stay for the Humanities meeting will depend on the time interval involved--I hate to leave Mary for too long. If you are to speak, I shall certainly be tempted to stay.

I hope something comes out of the Sir George Williams business. I feel sure that it won't be long before Canadian universities generally adopt the American practice of having resident poets & creative writers as members of English depts. Meanwhile, we are all very academically proper & tend to insist on PhD's even from people like Reaney who were obviously never meant to bother with them. In fact, PhD-itis has ruined both Jay Macpherson & Reaney as poets, it seems to me. I was re-reading The Red Heart over the weekend, & it's a damn fine first book which makes his latest look wan & scholarly.

Prism has now rejected my story about seduction in Cambridge, so it looks as if my new look does not appeal to the critics. Pity!

All the best,

Des Pacey

enclosure: David Fairbairn, "Irving Layton versus Dave Fairbairn" (interview), Brunswickan, 22 Jan 1960: 5.

:Carol MacPherson article, see .2.


3 On July 3, 1965, the Montreal Star announced that Irving Layton was to be confirmed by Sir George Williams University as Canada's first writer-in-residence; this was soon followed by an announcement by the University of New Brunswick that Norman Levine had been appointed writer-in-residence effective September 1965 and by the University of Toronto that Earle Birney was to be their poet-in-residence effective September 1965.


5 Reaney, A Suit of Nettles; see 184.3.

February 10, 1960

Dear Desmond,

Excuse this card, but I’ve been at work revising my story to meet a deadline Bob Weaver gave me. At last it’s finished and a professional typist has got it. She promised to have it for me by Wednesday. The story is quite good now, and I certainly profited from your criticisms. Many thanks.

To celebrate the Star Weekly article, I gave a very big party. It was held at my friend’s house; mine couldn’t have accommodated the 45 persons who came. Everyone had a great time, especially my son, Max, who entertained by playing his guitar and singing. He made a great hit with everyone. I am very proud of him. Naomi grows more and more beautiful. I shall write you a letter this Saturday.

Love,
Irv

1"Dislocation;" see 257.3.

2See 269.3.

3William Goodwin (Vehivel Goldberg; b. 1916), Layton’s nephew and close friend, Professor of English at Champlain College in Montreal; now retired.

February 10, 1960

Dear Desmond,

I set my class an exam and found this card in my pocket. It’s much more pleasant writing to you than staring vacantly into space.

F.R. Scott phoned to tell me how much he liked my Aviva poem in the Can Forum. So did Al Purdy. I need all the cheering up I can get, I’ve been hung up with a racking cold. The worst is over, but my ribs and diaphragm still heave from time to time and my poor throat erupts in a rat-a-tat of explosive coughs. But I’ll live.

Have you heard of the Archpoet, a character who lived in the 12th century? I’ve just recently discovered him. His concept is much like my own. Just now I’m reading with huge delight Helen Waddell’s The Wandering Scholars. A marvellous book which brings all the sweetness of early Med Europe to me.

Next year I’m taking off to write. I expect to go to some Greek island.

Love,
Irving

PS Haven’t rec’d cheque from UNB. Very grateful for the extras!


2The Archpoet was a German parodic poet of the 12th century; see chapter VII, "The Archpoet," The Wandering Scholars 147-160.
February 15, 1960

Dear Desmond,

Two days ago you might have thought it was spring. The streets were bare of snow, the sun was shining, the temperature was a balmy 45°. It even fooled my cat, Ligabue, who began to yodel sexually, and couldn’t be kept in the house. But Now, my poor semi-basement apartment looks like a besieged bunker. The snow is piled up high against the windows; hardly any light comes through them. The cars along Ridgewood Avenue wear a look of eternal immobility; looking at them, one has the feeling they’ll never run again, that their wheels are a mockery and a pretension. The only thing that gives me courage is the short evergreen just outside the kitchen window, its poor twigs, shivering and defiant, the only bit of greenness in the white desolation everywhere.

You know, the fifty dollars from UNB came the same day I sent off the postcard to you. The sum comes in handily. Keeping two households going is hard on one’s pocket. I’m trying not to touch the CC money, so that I can take next year to write. Yaddo has sent me an invitation to spend six months there—I cd probably stretch it to one year—and I’m thinking of accepting their invitation. It’s an estate that was left by some wealthy couple many years ago, to be used for the encouragement of writers. All expenses paid, etc, etc.

I’d like to finish a book of short stories for next Spring, as well as a book of poems. To date, I have about 16 poems, and eight short stories. A good year of writing, far from the pressing anxieties I’ve had this year would give me both books. Tomorrow I’m beginning another story, and I ought to have it completed by the end of this month. I want to write one short story each month, so that one year from now I’ll have twenty to publish or pick from.

I liked re-reading your story in the Can Forum. For my money, you’re far and away the best story writer in this country. You’ve a sense of form, of economy, and a quiet passion, that must one day win you the recognition you deserve. Keep on writing them, and never despair. One day you’ll have a large book containing 40 or 50 stories that will be the handsomest monument that anyone of us will leave behind. I’m bewildered that your two most recent stories have not been taken, especially the Bed one, which struck me as being particularly good. Why don’t you publish it in The Fiddlehead or send it to some Am magazine?

I’ve had several postcards from Leonard Cohen. He seems to be thriving. He’s completed 50,000 of a 70,000 [word] novel. McClelland & Stewart are publishing his book of verse this fall. I suppose when he’s finished his novel, he’ll leave London for the Continent, where he’ll make love
to all the beautiful French and Italian women, and then leave for Greece and Israel.

Have you seen Purdy and Acorn's *The Moment*? It's lively. Both of them are writing a great deal and both of them are getting better and better. Purdy is beginning to hit his stride now. He's got lots of talent; all that he's wanted is control and direction. Milton Wilson aptly hit off his virtues and defects in his review in the current number of the *Can Forum*.

Max is coming over this afternoon. He speaks of leaving school, the poor fellow is so bored by it all. No challenge, no stimulation, nothing. And reading the biographies of Jack London, Maxim Gorki, and Eugene O'Neill has fired him with the idea of emulating them. He wants to write stories and novels, thinks school has nothing to offer him. He's probably right. But I think I'll convince him to hold off his forays into the great big world until he graduates High School. After that, it might be a fine idea to stay out of college for one or two years.

"My little one" is jubilant with her immortalization in "The Day Aviva Came to Paris". All my love to Mary and your children.

Hugs,
Irv

closure: June Callwood, see 269.3.

1Yaddo.

2"The Weasel," see 258.1.

3"When She Comes Over," see 254.4.


5This novel eventually became *The Favourite Game* (see 456.1); "originally titled *Beauty at Close Quarters*, the novel was rewritten at least five times." Michael Ondaatje, *Leonard Cohen* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970) 23.


[s.c.]: February 20, 1960 letter to Ron Everson
:February 21, 1960 letter to Louis Dudek

291.[pc] February 23, 1960
Dear Desmond,

My anger is over--there won't be any "Open Letter to Ron Everson".¹ I'm probably more at fault than Everson is, though my motives were blameless and beautiful, and his weren't. I should have remembered the old adage about needing a long spoon to sup with the Devil. The best thing is to forget the whole episode. Yet imagine the cool villiany of the fellow--asserting he had read all my first draft manuscripts for the past four years! A year from now the story would be, given his PR mind, that he had helped me, and not the other way round. I had to scotch that one as violently as I could, hence the letter. How glad I am I returned a $100 cheque he once sent me, by way of a gift, and that I insisted we'd each pay for our own meals and drinks, or that if he picked up the tab one time, I'd pick it up the next time. In no way whatsoever am I obligated to him. What a relief to know that! Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irv

¹"An Open Letter to Ron Everson" was not published.

292. February 24, 1960
Dear Irving,

I have in front of me your two postcards of Feb 10. your letter to me of Feb 15, and copies of your letters to Everson & Dudek. Yesterday the lovely Breughel book arrived for Mary,¹ & the dollar for Pete's Kindness Club.² I acknowledge all these with thanks, and apologize for being so long in answering them. The fact is that I have been over my ears in work all this month, and haven't written any personal letters. I knew that taking on that Extension course in Creative Writing would overload me--and it has. I just can't keep up with the tide of essays, short stories, one-act plays etc that flow over my desk day after day!

Well to answer your communications seriatum. Glad to hear that your short story is finished, and hope I shall have an opportunity to see the revised version.

Thanks for the Star Weekly. Not a bad article for that kind of rag. At any rate I'm glad that you made it an excuse for a party and that your children gave you cause for pride.

Wasn't it nice that your Aviva poem & my short story appeared in the same issue of the Forum? Your poem read extremely well, and it took Mary & me back to your apartment and the very pleasant supper we shared with you & Aviva. Purdy wrote to congratulate me on my story, & sent a copy of his new mag.³ He's a generous soul--though a tormented
bugger, I should guess. I feel he’s a mass of raw nerve-endings, & that one should try & soothe him. Have I read him properly? He’s not that rough tough customer he tried to appear that night at your place, is he? I feel that he’s very insecure about his lack of education, of the social graces, of suavity—though this is probably what makes him a poet. I agree with you that he is steadily emerging as a poet.

Your mid-February cold coincided with mine. When your card arrived saying you were racked with cold, I too was wheezing & sneezing & heaving—but mine is better now & I trust yours is also.

Glad the $50 cheque was so welcome. We certainly thought your visit was worth it. I do hope that your plans for next year will materialize. Six months at Yaddo would be great.

Thanks for your very complimentary remarks about my story. I wish it were true that I was the best short story writer in the country. I’ll go on trying, anyway. By the way, Milton Wilson has kept my Cambridge bed story since January 5 or so, & I think that must mean he is planning to use it in the Forum. He almost took the Conversion story (about the Ontario bootleggers), but felt the ending was a trifle weak. I’m not sure that I really want it published, for it’s not really sincere. I really don’t see people cynically & satirically, and I had to pretend I did. My own artistic problem is this: I know that the two sides of my nature are tenderness & passion; I seem able in my stories only to project my tenderness. My work lacks force—and yet I am a forceful person. Perhaps it’s the Yeats mask business: my forcefulness finds expression in my work as an academic administrator, & my anti-self finds expression in my wistful little stories.

And what about you in relation to the Yeats mask theory? Your writing seems to be a direct reflection of your social personality. Is it?

Your postcards from Leonard Cohen remind me of two things: a) I had a very nice letter from Dorothy Livesay in Paris, where she is working for Unesco. Felix Walter is there too, & he’d been reading my "introduction" to Dorothy’s Selected Poems & was very impressed by my acute analysis of Canadian intellectual life in the thirties; b) Wilson sent me for review the two chapbooks, Varsity Chapbook & McGill Chapbook. The latter included poems by Cohen. I decided to have fun, & reviewed them as an intercollegiate hockey game—saying that McGill won 16-4, that Jay Macpherson made a brilliant rush up the ice—and that sort of thing. It will be different, anyway!

Hope you were able to persuade Max to stay in school. The myth of the uneducated genius is just that. How high a proportion of good poets in English did not have a university education? Burns, Blake, Whitman...who else?

Well, I’m less happy about your Everson, Dudek letters. As I said long ago, you were wrong to think that a Public
Relations man could be anything but a friend of the powers-that-be. Why whip yourself up into such a rage about it? And has Everson really got this tremendous reputation as a poet—thanks to you or not—that you speak of? If he’d falsely become a Nobel Prizewinner or something, I’d see your point—but he’s published a couple of vanity books and received polite plaudits from his friends. So what? And why go on kicking Louis when he’s down? Louis may pretend to himself, by writing self-justifying critical articles, but it’s clear to any objective observer that he is down—and almost out. Since he was once a good poet, I sincerely hope that he will find himself again—meanwhile the best thing to do is to let him be. I deplore the waste of your energies on these petty personal frenzies. You live too close to these people: you see them as giants, when they’re really pygmies. You’ll say I’m pretending to be above the battle—but I honestly feel that it’s an advantage, for a critic at least, to live away from the centre of things, & thus see them in perspective. You are riding high, & Everson & Dudek are struggling along in the dusk—so why bother turning round to lash the poor buggers?

To end on a happier note, it was terribly kind of you to send Mary the book & Peter the dollar. Mary is very fond of Breugel, & has long wanted that Skira book. And Peter immediately called the president of the Kindness Club to report the donation!

I meant to tell you of some of my own activities, but they are all academic "busyness" of one sort or another, so I’ll skip them.

Love,
Des P


2The Kindness Club was founded in 1959 by Aida Flemming (see 263.6) as a children’s organization promoting concern for animals. It quickly became worldwide in scope, with Dr Albert Schweitzer serving as honorary president until his death.

3Al Purdy, letter to Desmond Pacey, 13 Feb. 1960, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

4Dorothy Livesay, letter to Desmond Pacey, 30 Jan. 1960, National Archives of Canada.


6Felix Walter, former Professor of French, head of the French education system of UNESCO in Paris.

7See 38.5.
Dear Desmond,

Thanks for your letter. From where you are, the whole fracas here must seem like an angry sputtering teapot. But what will Canadians fight about, I mean Cdn intellectuals? I think poetry is important enough to fight about. Compare your attitude with that of the French or American literati. What do you mean, LD is down & out? You ought to read his articles or listen to him spout about the Romantics and some of the modern poets from his classroom dais. If no one else wants to tangle with him, I must. I’ve sent my "Open Letter to Louis Dudek" to the CF. I hope it gets published. Will write you a letter this Sunday.

Love,
Irv

Misdated February 23.

See 282.3.

Of course the big intellectual battles, and the spiritual ones too, are fought in other countries, and the noise of battle reaches us muted by distance. Canadian intellectuals and literati feel in their bones that what they have to say is not very significant; in time they even lose the desire to say it.

Well, I can’t go along with that attitude. The fight for poetry—for integrity and imagination—is important everywhere, and it is the size and the situation of the country that are irrelevant. Anyhow, that is my creed, and if I am wrongheaded, and mad and impulsive, there it is, I cannot help myself, and I am too old to change. The truth is, this country in its upper intellectual echelons, stinks with culture. Literature as a boutonniere in the lapel of the cultured philistine.

Hugs,
Irv

You’re of course right abt Everson. Not worth bothering with or making a fuss over. But I’m a mad poet, so there you are. One thing tho’ is certain. I shall never see him again, and that is all to the good, since it frees
me from a relationship that I was finding increasingly false & burdensome. He and I have about as much in common as Kruschev and Eisenhower. But Louis D is a colt of a different color. Here the differences are genuinely literary. I don’t know exactly what his influence is, but just for the record someone has to step up and tangle with him. He’s less honest than the late John Sutherland: he covers up his attack on modern poetry in general and the younger Cdn poets in particular by an apparent concern for them. My article is hard-hitting and to the point. I hope Wilson likes it well enough to publish it.

Love,
Irv

296. March 6, 1960
Dear Desmond,

Good news! The CBC has taken my short story—for $1,000.1 What a windfall. Now there’s no doubt in mind I’ll take the whole year off and write. Perhaps I’ll go to Italy or the south of France; perhaps San Francisco, where I have a brother living.2 He’s been urging me for a long time to come and settle there. I shall be in SF for the Easter holidays. When there, I’ll have a look around. If things are as favourable as my brother says they are, I might pull up stakes after another year or so.

This week I’m speaking at the St James Literary Society—"A Poet’s View of the World".3 It’s going to be tough and hard-hitting, I’ll tell you that. The week after that I’ll be addressing the McGill Political Science Club on "Politics and The Beatniks".4 Outside of Ginsberg’s Howl5 and one or two poems by Ferlinghetti,6 I’m ignorant about them. I’ll have lots of reading to do—I’ve bought Kerouac’s On The Road7 and the anthology of the Angry Young Men and The Beats.8 But this is a bad week for me, since I have a set of exam papers to mark, and The Rebel by Camus9 to read for one of my private lessons, and Sanctuary by Faulkner,10 for the other. If I get any sleep this coming week it’ll be a miracle. On top of that I’ve got an exam paper to prepare for Sir George Williams College. Summer seems so far away.

I loaned Al Purdy my copy of The Picnic. He told me he liked your story in the Canadian Forum, and was interested to see whether the other things you wrote were as good. I assured him they were. He doesn’t write stories, but he’d like to. I suppose you know that he’s sold five or six plays to the CBC.11 He’s very versatile. Did you see his poem in Delta on the three cities?12 Lots of good lines in it, impressionistically vivid, though it doesn’t satisfy as a poem. Journalistic? He’s a good critic of his own work, knows where lie his faults and weaknesses. His work improves steadily. He and Milton Acorn drop in for a glass of beer from time to time. Acorn has a good poem in the same number of Delta.13
I'm thinking of bringing out a parody on Delta. Call it Swamp.

Yes, you're probably right about yourself. A lot of your energy must go into administration, lecturing, etc. But perhaps another reason why you write as you do, is that the memories of your past experiences are vivid, and you can use them in a story. What about your present experiences? Can you use those? You lead a fairly well-regulated life; nothing too exciting, or dramatic can happen to you. Even if they did, you'd probably be reluctant or inhibited about putting them into a story. You write the stories you do, because they're safe; emotionally, you're their master, you're in control, they're lived experiences. If you were to cut loose—just for the sake of the argument, I say this—you'd either become a great writer or a bum. I wonder whether you sometimes say that to yourself.

I'd like to see your review of the two College Chapbooks. It sounds like fun. How's Fairbairn? I liked him a whole lot; wish there was more like him around. I sent him a letter in reply to one of his,¹⁴ but I haven't heard from him again. Do give him my very best when you see him next.

Max has finished another poem, his first serious effort. He's in the kitchen typing it, for he wants to send a copy to Leonard Cohen. The boy has talent. Thank heaven, he also has some commonsense and some control on his emotions.

I'm glad Mary liked the Breugel book. You have a lovely wife and family. You're an enviable man, Desmond.

Love to all,
Irving

¹See 257.3.
²See 275.10.
⁵Allen Ginsberg, Howl and Other Poems (San Francisco: City Lights, 1956).
⁶Lawrence Ferlinghetti (b. 1919), Beat poet and publisher, founder of City Lights and the Pocket Poets Series, author of A Coney Island of the Mind (1958) and The Secret Meaning of Things (1969).
March 10, 1960

Dear Irving,

Heartiest congratulations on winning the Governor-General’s Award!¹ You have deserved it for years—and you have finally got it. It must be a great thrill for you, and I hope you had a real wing-ding of a party to celebrate it.

Well, I have four postcards, a magazine, & a letter from you to answer.

What do I mean about Louis Dudek being down & out? I mean that his reputation as a poet has been steadily declining since about 1950, and that his attempt to make a reputation as a critic in compensation has not succeeded. Dudek is not taken seriously by academics across the country: he has no critical status. I know that doesn’t necessarily matter: academics are, well, academic. But all I’m trying to say is that though Dudek may still loom large in your consciousness, because of your proximity, he does not loom large on the Canadian scene. He did loom quite large as a poet in the latter half of the forties—but now he doesn’t loom large in any respect. He undoubtedly has a few disciples among his students—it’s a very poor prof who doesn’t—but his influence now isn’t at all comparable to that of Milton Wilson or James Reaney or George Woodcock or Malcolm Ross or Northrop Frye or several others I might mention.

Is there or is there not to be an "Open Letter to Louis Dudek"? In one card (Feb 23) you say your anger is over & there will be no letter; in another, dated Feb 29, you express the hope that Wilson will print it.

I agree that if there were a real ideological battle to be fought with Dudek, it should be fought. But what is the issue? It seems to me that his critical denigrations of you, Cohen, etc etc are so obviously sour grapes. It is the voice of the disappointed man: "if I can’t be good, no one else shall be good either." I can’t see any more than that in his articles—and that, plus the fact that they are poorly organized and weakly argued seems to me to discredit them automatically. Why beat a dead dog? I’d feel more like

¹William Faulkner, Sanctuary (New York: Cape & Smith, 1939).


saying to Louis—"Look here, your own poetry used to be very good, & you’ve earned your niche. Someday we hope you’ll again find direction. Meanwhile, why not try short stories, or an autobiographical novel?"

To turn to your letter of March 6. It is good news about your short story. A thousand bucks? Whew! I didn’t know they paid that kind of money—when I used to send my short stories to CBC for Canadian Short Stories they used to pay me $75.2 What’s happened?

And you’re off to San Francisco? Well, no Canadian writer has ever left Canada & remained a good writer! Look what happened to Roberts, Carman, Gilbert Parker,3 Merrill Denison,4 Leo Kennedy.5 You’ll be running an awful risk.

Thanks for lending The Picnic to Purdy. He wrote me a nice note about "The Weasel".6 He seems to be a much more generous, warm-hearted, courteous person in his letters than he seemed in person that night at your apartment. Yes, I read his poem in Delta—& liked it, especially the line

City of poets with enormous egos!7

A nice hit at you, eh? You conceited bugger!

Have you got your Winter 1960 issue of The Fiddlehead yet? Do you think it is now a better magazine—in both appearance & content? This is the first issue that I have really edited & made up.8

We’ve finally had some adverse criticisms as a result of your visit here. Apparently some nuns in Saint John saw your poems in the Brunswickan9 & complained to the Bishop who in turn complained to the President—but the pres was delighted to be able to point out that you had just won the Gov Gen’s Award!

All the best,
Des Pacey

1Layton’s A Red Carpet for the Sun won the Governor-General’s Award for poetry for 1959.

2See 153.4.

3Gilbert Parker (1860-1932), prolific novelist and short story writer (Pierre and his People 1892), remembered now as director of American propaganda for the British during World War I.

4Merrill Denison (1893-1975), Canadian-American playwright who wrote plays for Hart House theatre in the 1920s and radio scripts for NBC and CBS in the 30s; after World War II he wrote a number of corporate histories.

5Leo Kennedy (b. 1907), Montreal poet, member of the Montreal school, founding editor of Canadian Mercury (1928), author of The Shrouding (1933).

6Al Purdy, letter to Desmond Pacey, 3 March 1960, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

7"City of eye shadow and athletic priests
French poodles and exquisite buttocks
City of poets with enormous egos."
8Pacey contributed to the Fiddlehead in its early days as a mimeographed poetry magazine (1945-52); in that year the range and format of the journal altered to a printed quarterly publishing both poetry and reviews, with Pacey serving on the editorial board. He became prose editor in 1959 when the Fiddlehead’s range expanded again. In 1960, Fred Cogswell abdicated his position as longtime poetry editor to become honorary editor for a year; in his absence, David Galloway and Allen Donaldson became poetry editors, Pacey and J.K. Johnstone served as prose editors. Pacey continued in this function until 1971, and continued to serve on the editorial board until his death.

298. [pc] March 19, 1960
Dear Desmond,

Another very crowded week, and still another to follow. This Monday I speak to the McGill Political Science Faculty on "The Political Significance of the Beatniks". And on Thursday, Scott, Purdy and I give a reading at the Fine Arts Museum. To prepare for Monday’s talk I've had to read stories, poems, articles etc by and about Beatniks. I've learned a lot. They've given me a good shaking up. How easily the fat accumulates!

I'm a furious egotist, but I am NOT conceited.

Hugh MacLennan & I were on a radio program together this Thursday. We got on splendidly. This morning I received a letter from him about A Red Carpet For The Sun. Very enthusiastic. Which is really magnanimous of him, considering my expressed reservations on his book. Goodness is NOT dead.

Love,
Irving


3Hugh MacLennan, letter to Irving Layton, 18 Mar. 1960, Layton Collection, Concordia University.

4See 247.4.


299. March 30, 1960
Dear Irving,

I have your card of March 19 & various clippings & a copy of your open letter to Louis D. For all of which, many thanks.

To explain my long silence, I should tell you that Mary was called up to Ottawa a week ago last Saturday by the
sudden illness of her mother. I was left alone to cope with the housework & the college for ten days. Mary’s mother died last Thursday evening,1 the funeral was last Saturday, & Mary returned home this Monday. I have been so terrifically busy that I have not had a moment for my writing or even thinking. I am glad you got along so well with Hugh M. He is a splendid fellow, I believe—a much better person in real life than his books would lead you to believe. I shall try to write at greater length when I have somewhat reduced the great backlog of work on my desk.

As ever, 
Des Pacey


April 5, 1960

Dear Desmond,

I had intended writing you a letter this last weekend, and the weekend before. That’s the only time I can attend to my mail. But both opportunities came and went, and I wasn’t able to use them, because things kept pressing in. Now that I live more centrally, I’m not immune from frequent visitors who, unannounced and unexpected, take it into their heads to favour me with their visits. Since I’m a hospitable chap, the hours go by with useless chatter, the letters don’t get written, and murderous thoughts accumulate in my head. Then the phone calls! I’m a celebrity and I’m supposed to listen to every damn crackpot who wishes to marry his “brilliant scheme” to my “genius”. I never knew there were that many lost souls, trembling on the verge of discovery and greatness. All it needs, it would seem, for them to receive their proper due, would be for someone like myself to take an interest in their particular scheme, whatever it is, and they’d be off stirring great clouds of glory in the face of every skeptic who had been mean to them. What a world!

About two weeks ago, Frank Scott, Al Purdy, Gnarowski and I gave a poetry reading at the Art Gallery. It was an immense success! You’ll find it hard to believe this, but over 150 persons were turned away. The place was packed, and those who were unlucky enough not to find seats had to stand for more than two hours. Which they did, without making a sound. The barriers are breaking down. Westmount society (represented by Ogilvie’s Flour Mills, the Baxters, etc) rubbed shoulders that night with “proletarian soupspoons”. It was altogether right that poetry should have been the means to dissolve the class differences and induce a kinder fellow-feeling. After all, in this strange world, we’re all fellow-travelling mortals.

A couple of weeks ago, I gave a talk to the McGill Political Science Faculty on "The Political Significance of the Beatniks". F.R. Scott sat in on it. He told me the
next day that what had most impressed the Chairman of the Department was the logical way I had presented my arguments. What did he expect—a wild outpouring of emotion, fluxions of feeling? Still, I don’t know whether I ought to feel myself altogether complimented. A poet being praised for his logic, is like Elizabeth Taylor or any other beautiful woman being praised for her preparation of borscht. Ours is not to persuade, but astonish.

I took Aviva and Max (who has come to live with me) with me to Ottawa for the presentation of the GG’s award. Max made a hit with everyone. Northrop Frye, Douglas Grant, Trueman, MacLennan, etc were all there, and it was a fine party. The laurels were pinned to our distinguished brows while the TV cameras clicked, and the chefs prepared the tastiest shrimps and wines. The Vaniers\(^2\) are a nice old couple—it must be awful to lead their lives. I felt very compassionate towards them. But I suppose at their age there isn’t much else they can do. I hope they’re at least writing their memoirs. I didn’t get a chance to talk to Frye, though Aviva did.

I am sorry to learn of the death of Mary’s mother. The death of my own mother is still recent enough for me to feel with her all the grief that she is living through. I also know how useless and irrelevant consoling words sound at such a time. There’s no help for it: the tears must fall; in time they make their own pools of silence. Have you caught up with your work yet? Writing anything? Reading? Don’t miss seeing Williams’ Suddenly Last Summer,\(^3\) if it comes your way. It went over the heads of everyone down here. All my love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

1 Michael Gnarowski (b. 1934), poet and editor, Professor of English at Carleton (1972–); author of The Gentlemen are Also Lexicographers (1968), and editor of Yea (1956-69) and Leonard Cohen: the Artist and his Critics (1976).


301. April 7, 1960

Dear Irving,

Delighted to get your letter this morning. I was beginning to think that your new eminence was leading to a new snobbery, and that I had heard the last of you. (This not very seriously!)

Well, your letter made me boiling mad, and I have just despatched a really scathing missive to one Dr J.J. Talman,\(^1\) Librarian of Western & former(?) chairman of the Governor-General’s Award Board.
What made me so angry? Your statement that the Ottawa ceremony at which the medals were distributed was attended by all the leading literary notables such as Trueman, Grant, & Frye—and my sudden realization that I had been snubbed. Do you know that just over a year ago this man Talman wrote to me & said that the Board planned to present a brief to the Canada Council asking that a new system of awarding the medals be worked out. He said that he realized I was no longer a member of the Board, but he remembered how efficient a member I had been & how many good ideas I’d had about improving the system—and so he was writing to ask for my suggestions. Well, to make a long story short, I gave all my reasons for thinking that the medals should be accompanied by cash awards, and among other things suggested that to give the medals the prestige they so sadly lacked they should be presented personally by the GG at a special ceremony in Ottawa to which leading literary figures from all over the country should be invited. Talman wrote back on April 22, 1959 (I have the letter before me) saying that my suggestions were so good that he was just adopting my letter as his brief and presenting it in toto to the CC!

Now do you see why I’m mad? What the hell did Grant or Frye ever do for the medals? What the hell did Trueman do except stall or hinder my scheme for about three years?

This is not, I’m afraid, an oversight or an isolated example. It’s symptomatic of the attitude of central Canada, whereby it assumes that it is the whole of Canada. The Maritimes don’t count; the West only counts when it’s wheat that’s at stake. Trueman has held several so-called "national" conferences on the arts in Canada—has he ever invited me? No, I don’t count. I’m just the best literary critic in the country, the only one who for years has taken Can literature seriously & given it the best of my brains & heart—but I live away off in little Fredericton so I don’t count. I’d like to get hold of Trueman by the balls and squeeze and squeeze and squeeze...

You sound like a very busy man. I’m equally busy. This past Monday night we [had] a variety show called the Faculty Follies in aid of world refugees. I was Master of Ceremonies (dressed in a straw boater & telling slightly risqué jokes about the students & administration) & also acted in the English Dept skit—we took off our convocation exercises, & I gave a Diefenbaker type of address, platitudes delivered in a pompous manner and with rhetorical flourishes of all kinds. We packed Mem Hall & had to turn hundreds away! A helluva lot of fun—followed by a hilarious party at my house.

Tuesday night I had to address the Maritime Entomological Society’s annual banquet—I’d meant to speak seriously on Can Lit but after four cocktails changed my mind & just reminisced humorously about my own writing career.

Last night I gave an extra three hour seminar to my honours class—Milton, at their request.
Tonight I address the annual banquet for the UNB athletes.
Friday night Mary & I attend the opening of Goodridge Roberts' exhibition at the Beaverbrook Gallery.¹
Saturday I go to Saint John to address all the teachers, School Board, principals, & professors of English from other Maritime universities on "What the Universities Expect of High School Graduates in English Composition & Literature."
The next week I go back to Saint John to address the Women's Canadian Club on "Canadian Poetry", & the week after that I go back to address the St George's Society on "The Pageant of English Literature."
So with exams to mark, final lectures to give etc etc I'm afraid I shan't have much time for writing or reading. I should like to tell you the section of my MC's jokes that dealt with Fairbairn.
Between the previous two numbers I'd been kidding the Campus Queen, a nursing student, & saying that it would be pleasant to be ill under her ministrations etc. Then I said "Well, I hear Mr Fairbairn's ill, by the way. Has an ulcer. But he's taking out a law student. Must think he needs a lawyer more than a nurse. Well, with that seditious column of his I don't wonder. Hotbed. You know I wondered what that title meant. I looked it up in Webster: "A box of well-rotted manure."
"You know Fairbairn's writing a novel? Yes. He calls it Layton Place."²
"Oh that Layton! Wasn't that some interview he gave Fairbairn? But you know when I poured him on the train for Montreal he said "I came to UNB to teach you about sex--but I'm going back loaded!"
"Oh well, even I am still learning from Learning."³

*who writes the sexy stuff in my creative writing class.

Love,
Des

¹J(arties) J(ohn) Talman (1904-), librarian, University of Western Ontario (1939-), chairman, Governor-General's Award Board (1956-59).
²J.J. Talman, letter to Desmond Pacey, 16 Apr. 1959, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.
³Talman, letter to Desmond Pacey, 22 Apr. 1959, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.
⁴Latin: in its entirety.
⁶Pacey is playing on the title of the bestseller Peyton Place by Grace Metalious (New York: Messner, 1956).
7Walter Learning (b. 1938), theatre director, founder of Theatre New Brunswick, Artistic Director, the Confederation Centre of the Arts and Charlottetown Festival, 1987-present, author (with Alden Nowlan) of Frankenstein: The Play (1974) and The Incredible Murder of Cardinal Tosca (1978); received his BA from UNB in 1961.

302.[pc] San Francisco
April 18, 1960

Dear Desmond,

I had intended to write you before leaving for SF. When I came here, I got lost in the shuffle of ocean, white buildings and sunlight—even played Blackjack at Lake Tahoe, walking away from the gambling table with a win of fifty dollars. This is a great city, a great country. It looks as if I’ll return here this July and remain for a year or perhaps two. Though Montreal has a greater population than SF, it’s a big village by comparison with it. I’ve met Lawrence Ferlinghetti—a narcissistic ass, if you ask me. From here the beatniks look like an inflamed pimple on the fair complexion of SF. The weather has been glorious during my entire stay of nine days. Tomorrow I leave for Montreal. Love to Mary.

Yrs,
Irv

303. Tuesday [April 26, 1960]

Dear Desmond,

This for now. Will write you a long letter this Thursday. Am in the middle of exams, etc. Did you receive my card from SF—and Mary my letter? I’ve written two more sonnets besides this one. Let’s use the American lingo—English is dead: too literary; inadequate for our experience and sensibility. Compare the St James version of Ecclesiastes with the enclosed. However, don’t miss the subtleties. Makes all the difference.

Yrs,
Irv


304. May 2, 1960

Dear Desmond,

I sent you a poem, a postcard—just to let you know I’m alive. I hope you rec’d them, and Mary my letter from San Francisco.1 I’ve had a hard time adjusting myself to the cold wind and cloudy skies of Montreal after the warmth and sunlight of SF. Still, here’s my home—I mean, I’d have to start making a whole new set of enemies if I left, and it’s questionable whether they’d be of the same distinguished calibre. Moreover, I’m vain enough to think this country needs someone like me around to jolt it from time to time. The real prophet, that’s me! Anyhow, I’ve lost my job,2 that’s definite, because from time immemorial no one has
worried how poor poets eat, and certainly the boors and ignoramuses who run the school where I work aren’t going to concern themselves too much about me, though on the Sabbath they’ll run to the synagogue to read the words of Amos and Isaiah! What hypocrisy! I’ve written a Jewish Cantata which consists of two short verses, naming names, and hitting as hard as I can: what I’m chiefly about is to make the distinction clear between the Hebrew (the true Jew) and the so-called Jews, a lousy bunch of ignorant exploiters whom Amos wouldn’t shit on—or maybe he would! Here’s a sample squib.

Isaiah Freezes
O my people, I foresee the Jew
God’s retribution on the Hebrew!

Amos Speaks
A smell as if from the tomb
Three rich Jews in the same room.

Misfortunes
The Hebrew’s misfortune has been two:
The bearded rabbi and the moneyed Jew.

God Sums Up
A handful of dreamers and men of wit
The rest, heartless shrewdies, not worth a shit.

These are only a part of the Cantata: the others name the manufacturers, etc. Here’s a lovely one:

Mr Beutel Lays A Cornerstone
Near forlorn beaches
Turtles drop their eggs
So do ostriches
And great blue herons
With delicate legs.
He so proudly furred
On his large estate
--No reptile or bird--
Lays his cornerstones
Stamped with name and date.

As you see, I don’t intend to let them forget. Mr Beutel-pants manufacturer—is the President of the United Talmud Torahs. Did you know the man, you’d understand my anger and disgust. No other word for him—obscene!

I can understand your anger about the GG’s party. Since you had a hand in the whole thing, you certainly ought to have been asked to attend. You’ve done more for Cdnn poetry than anyone else in this country—that’s a fact—and it wd have been simple justice to have sent you an invitation. It wd have been great fun to have seen you; my
pleasure in the event wd have been that much greater. Ah, justice! where have you fled?

So Caryl Chessman⁵ is dead. My school was the only one to march in protest before the American Consulate, lots of my students being hauled to jail. I’ve sent a telegram to Eisenhower, telling him that a country which can be guilty of so perverse an act must be either sick or insane. This is a black day for the Americans. Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad. No act of the USA could have delighted the men in the Kremlin more. What a crazy world! I’m sick at heart.

Aff’ly yours,
Irving

¹Pugitive.

²Layton had just been informed that, after August 30 1960, his contract would not be renewed; Layton’s letter of appeal, 30 April 1960, to Joseph Caplan, Honorary Secretary of the United Talmud Torahs of Montreal is in the Irving Layton Collection, Concordia University Library, Montreal.

³Layton published his "Jewish Cantata" in the form of several individual poems only: eight poems in Moment 3 (see 310), seven poems in the Canadian Forum (see 314.8) and six poems in The Swinging Flesh: "Mr Beutel Lays a Cornerstone," (147), "The Atonement" (149), "Bitter Almonds" (157; which consists of five titled sections "Consistency," "Misfortunes," "Kaplan’s Prayer for the High Holidays," "Tombsmell," and "For the Defence"), "In Praise of Benefactors" (158), and "Beutel’s Name Is Inscribed for Life" (172).

⁴An association of schools for the teaching of the Talmud or Oral Law, a body of rabbinic literature.

⁵Caryl Chessman (1922—60), American sentenced to die in 1948 after being convicted in a sex—kidnapping case. He fought off the sentence for twelve years through a series of appeals spurred by worldwide reaction to the case and nation-wide debate about the death penalty. Chessman was executed on 2 May 1960.

May 10, 1960
Dear Irving,

Thank you for your postcard, poem & letter. I am sorry to have been so long answering, but life here has been both hectic & grim in the last two or three weeks. Immediately after Easter the examinations started, & I have been furiously marking papers until yesterday. That was the chief "hectic" element, although we have been having our kitchen at home re-modelled (yes, Mary won the argument!) & that has made things there very inconvenient.

The grimness has come from two deaths. First, a week ago yesterday, some workmen found the decomposing body of one of my students¹ who had been missing for about ten days. He had leapt from the smokestack of the hospital headfirst, & his head & shoulders were sticking through the roof of a small building on the hospital grounds! The poor fellow was an English lad who was putting himself through college by
working as a hospital orderly. No one knows why he killed himself—no doubt worry about exams was one factor, but there were probably others. But the thought of him struggling up that iron ladder on the smokestack!

The same day they found poor Bazley's body I heard that my best friend on the faculty, Graham MacKenzie, head of the Geology Dept, had had a heart attack & had been taken to hospital for a week & would thereafter be required to stay in bed at home for a month. That was bad enough—but suddenly on Thursday afternoon last he had a coronary & died. He was only 55, & leaves a wife & two young sons. I was pallbearer at his funeral Sunday afternoon, and haven't been able to think of anything else since.

Well, I was delighted to hear what a good time you were having in San Francisco, but even more delighted to hear that you have decided to stay in Canada. I do really feel that you are needed more here, & that this country never will amount to anything if all her rebels & intellectuals & artists run off to the USA or England. It is natural enough to feel that the cultural atmosphere of this country is stifling, but it's odd that almost all those who fled it left their talents behind them. What writer ever left this country & became a better writer as a result of it? Look what happened, on the contrary, to Roberts, Carman, Parker, Leo Kennedy etc. They made more money abroad, but they didn't produce better work.

I like your "Jewish Cantata" very much indeed. I'd love to read it all. But the "Sagebrush Classic" struck me as utter bilge!

Yours as ever,
Des Pacey

PS Mary sends her love.

1Denis A.H. Bazley (1935-60), student at the University of New Brunswick.

2Graham MacKenzie (1905—60), joined the University of New Brunswick as a Professor of Geology in 1937.

306. May 14, 1960
Dear Desmond,

If it weren't for the fact you've had such a grim time of it the last few weeks, I'd give you a verbal drubbing for failing so dismally with another poem of mine. You worry me—what am I going to do with you? You muffed "Because My Calling Is Such"—as splendid a lyric as any poet has ever written; and now you compound your sins by mudding "Sagebrush Classic" and calling it "utter bilge". I wish it were my good fortune to go on writing such "bilge" for the rest of my life. If there are any angels and messengers of God hovering around me, may they hear my prayer. Here's a poem that's remorseless, funny and subtle, and manages to
move on three or four levels of meaning with zoom and zip—and it's "utter bilge". No one since Swift has so pitilessly opened his eyes to the "excremental vision"—except that I have taken it one or two stages beyond him, so that I include him as well; and not only the artifacts of culture, but life itself (Swift slung it...) and I do it by means of a pun, and by using the American language, that is, contemporary English. You’re fast asleep, man, in Fredericton: it all comes from your terrible isolation from the significant currents of feeling and thinking of our times. That’s what’s so terrible about Canada. I have the feeling this country is about fifty years behind whatever is important in the world, whatever is new and commanding in tone and sensibility. A kind of Boy Scout mentality prevails here: goodness, optimism, forward-lookingness, etc, etc. We’re like the Sovietized Russians, though we lack the excuse of an omnipotent state constantly pumping red corpuscles and the correct philosophy into our veins. However, I’ll stop here: you’ve had enough trouble without my telling you what a fried potato you are. Instead, I’ll enclose a note from Milton Wilson which came the same day your letter did; and I’m doing so, not because I want to play you off against each other, but to make you stop and think. Is it really likely that a poem which was "utter bilge" would elicit such enthusiasm from him? You’ll notice, that he returns another poem which I sent along with it, and doesn’t hesitate to berate it sharply—additional proof that his enthusiasm and praise are sincere; and damned well it ought to be!

Aviva, Maxie and I are moving into a larger place next month—a five-room apartment surrounded by trees. We’re on the top floor, and there’s a natural fireplace in the room which I’m going to line with books and make my study. Aviva is delighted with it, and of course I am too. Maxie hasn’t seen it yet, but he’s prepared to take our enthusiasm on faith. The boy is certainly going to be a prose writer; he’s finished a thing called "Desperado Jew" which he’s sending on to the Canadian Forum. I think it’s an excellent piece of writing, and it’s just possible Wilson might take it.

My own story, "Dislocation," has been put off for a couple of weeks. I wasn’t happy with the reading of it, the chap who did it confusing me with Mordecai Richler, and my story with a shmaltzy Yiddish one. He’s done it over again, and Herb Steinhouse says it’s superb. I might go to hear it some day this week. Don’t take my strictures too much to heart. You occasionally miss the boat, but I always love you. Love to Mary.

Aff’ly,
Irving

1Milton Wilson, letter to Irving Layton, 1 May 1960, Layton Collection, Concordia University.
Dear Desmond,

Are you still with me—or have I lost you somewhere?
Sent you poems & a nasty drubbing letter. What’s the
good word from Fredericton?

Love,
Irving

PS Are you going to the Humanities do in Kingston?

enclosure: ts: "This Day I Am a Man," "Share Cropper,"
"Lamentations," "A Prayer," "An Anagram for Ben Beutel," The
Swinging Flesh 157, 172.

Hi, Desmond:

Yours, like Yeats’ tragic vision, is pretty much a
literary stance (Literature is the slag the fire of poetry
leaves behind).

Were you a careful reader and disposed to humility,
rather than to glibness, my poem "The Caged Bird" would give
you my view of tragic joy which is human and historical—not
"literary"—not a classroom stance. I believe I annotated
the poem for you so that you wouldn’t miss its point. Has
it occurred to you that in certain conditions and under
certain circumstances, to curse may be the most positive
thing a man can do? Think on this.

Hugs,
Irving

I’ve completed my "Notes for a Jewish Cantata" which
consists of 19 separate versicles, but combined, make a
unified attack on aspects of contemporary Jewish life I
don’t like anymore than Amos or Isaiah did in their time.

enclosure: ts "Beutel’s Name is Inscribed for Eternal Life,"
"Deep, Deeper, Deepest," "Kaplan’s Song of Songs,"
unpublished.

Dear Desmond,

"Dining Out" has been revised and, I think, much
improved.

You can have all these for The Fiddlehead, but I doubt
if Fredericton has the stamina and wisdom for them. But
don’t say afterwards that I never submit anything to the F’d.

It’s about time someone said the things I say in "Notes for a Jewish Cantata". In the preface to my next bk, The Swinging Flesh, I’m going to advance my own non-biological ethical concept of the "Jew".

Aff’ly,
Irving


May 30, 1960

Dear Irving,

You will think I am sulking or mad or ill or something—but it’s none of these. I’ve just been almost incredibly busy since your letter of May 14 arrived—in fact for over a month now.

That week of May 12 to 19 or so was our Encaenia (or Convocation) week, & I was loaded down with official duties of one kind or another. Added to my usual chores as secretary of the faculty & head of this dept, was the task of looking after two of our four honourary degree recipients—Norrie Frye (& wife Helen1) & Sir Alec Martin,2 English art authority. I enjoyed this chore, but [it] involved a great deal of buzzing back & forth to the airport, the hotel, going to this luncheon & that dinner & so forth & so on. Sir Alec Martin I greatly enjoyed—he’s a Trustee of all the major galleries in the UK, Ireland, New Zealand, etc, & served on the National Gallery of Ireland Board with Yeats, Lady Gregory3, et al. He’s an old man of 77 now, very lonely here, so I took him everywhere & he regaled me with stories of being at Coole Park & hearing Yeats read "Byzantium" by candlelight etc etc.

Frye’s a dull stick, though. I know that sounds crazy, & in a way it is because he’s a brilliant critic & has more knowledge per cubic inch of head than anyone in the country—but I mean as a person. There’s no warmth, no personal interest, no affection—though I’ve known him off & on for almost thirty years. His wife’s so much warmer & more personable. It’s a mystery to me how he manages to be principal when he manifestly cares so little for other human beings. You can give him three or four stiff scotches & he’s still cold. I kept plying him with drinks to get him to loosen up & let his pants down—but his fly was buttoned tightly to the last.

Encaenia night we usually have a few parties & this year proved to be no exception. Because of my friend Graham Mackenzie’s death we didn’t have a party of our own & as several of our closest friends felt the same way we expected to have a very quiet time this year. But at the last moment
we got five unexpected invitations, & I ended up at 4:15 in the morning seeing double! Somehow I drove home & got to bed, but don’t remember doing so! Fortunately I was able to get up without a hangover at 8 & drive the Fryes to the nine o’clock plane! I felt no ill effects at all, mirabile dicta.

Usually the week after Encaenia is a quiet one, but this year I had a terrific backlog of letters, business-type that is, essays, reports etc etc to write--& I’m only now beginning to get glimpses of the wood of my desk!

Then this past weekend Mary was away for three days in Halifax attending the Maritime Art Assoc Convention, so I had to cook, clean etc for the kids--& I also painted the outside of the house & part of the inside.

This coming Friday, June 3, Mary & I leave early in the car for Kingston, where I attend the Royal Society meetings from June 5 to 9. We expect to pass through Montreal on the morning of Saturday June 4--probably around noon. We’ll try to phone you--but don’t stay home especially, as we might not have time. It would be nice to have lunch together that day--but let’s leave it to chance.

We expect to be coming through Montreal again on our way home on June 9, but that being a school day I don’t suppose we should have a chance of seeing you.

Sorry you were mad about what I said re "Sagebrush Classic". I still think it is a rather cheap little poem, & Mary agrees with me. Milton Wilson isn’t my authority. You can do better than that.

I agree with your letter to the paper. One of Allen Dulles’s bright ideas, no doubt! Well, thank God Foster isn’t still around--he’d likely have had the U2 drop a trial bomb on Vladivostock as a bit of brinkmanship! Well, keep your prick up, you old cod you!

Love & kisses,
Des Pacey

PS I’ve just re-read your various notes & see I haven’t answered all your questions.

No, we shall not be at the Humanities do. I must go to the Royal Society this year, & to stay over for the Humanities would mean another full week away. I must get back here & get on with my books.

I see that most of the poems about Mr Beutel are in the new issue of Moment, so there’s not much point in our putting them in Fiddlehead. I think some of them are very clever, but one or two of them are just plain vulgar. However, I don’t particularly object to vulgarity so that isn’t meant to be an insult.

Wish we could somehow work an evening in Montreal over this trip. Only faint hope I see is: if we got an early start Friday & had good luck all the way we just might go right through to Montreal that day & get there in the evening. A very remote chance--but a chance. In which case we (let’s dream anyway) could have a few drinks & then go & see the grind girls take their clothes off. You see I’m
just a small town boy dreaming of the naughty city. I imagine strange orgies & yearn to be shocked by the wickedness of Sodom & Gomorrah. Charge! DP


2. Sir Alec Martin (1884-1971), Managing Director of Christie’s 1940-58, Governor and Guardian of the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin. (Frye was awarded a Doctor of Letters and Sir Alec Martin a Doctor of Laws.)

3. Isabella Augusta Persse (Lady Gregory) (1852-1932), Irish playwright, associated with W.B. Yeats in the Irish literary revival and the founding of the Irish National Theatre (later the Abbey Theatre).

4. The 1960 annual meeting of the Royal Society of Canada was held June 6-8 at Queen’s University in Kingston.

5. Allen Dulles (1893-1969), American lawyer, brother of John Foster Dulles (see 219.3); he negotiated the Nazi surrender in Italy and directed the CIA from 1953-61, considerably influencing foreign policy, as in the Bay of Pigs invasion (see 362).

6. Policy associated with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles: the art of advancing to the very brink of war but not engaging in it.

312. 5731 Somerled Ave.,
Montreal, Que.
June 27, 1960

Dear Desmond,

The Fiddlehead in: thanks for the plug. But why don’t you write?

The F much better in every way. Fewer poems, and each one nicely presented. Nowlan’s review is enthusiastic, for which of course I’m grateful, but I’d like to have seen more penetration in depth. I like his things, they’ve got an unacademic immediacy, a flavour of experience which the "myth-makers" (with the exception of Eli Mandel) have begun to snow under. Reaney read one of his latest at Kingston—-it was god-awful! Completely unintelligible. You used the right word—"pretentious". Johnston’s reading was a delight—the man and the poetry are one. AJM Smith turned out, his face looking more of a crushed exclamation mark than ever. You may or may not know it, but he’s the boy backing the myth-makers. For punishment, I sicked Henry Moscovitch on to him—they rode back together into Montreal. From the report I afterwards got, Smith had a tough time of it. Serves him right! I don’t like his eminence grise-ness.

Thank god for Desmond Pacey.

I suppose you’re in the middle of lots of work. It can’t be the meal we served you—but why haven’t we heard from you? Aviva has a secret crush on you, and Maxie thinks you’re a great guy. Love to Mary.

Aff’ly, Irving
Dear Irving,

Your letter just in—and it arouses all sorts of guilt feelings in me. Of course I should have written earlier—and I told Aviva on the phone that Thursday that I would. But I’ve been in a working mood, and was afraid to break the routine. I haven’t written one letter since I got back—and there’s a great pile on my desk to answer. Instead I’ve been writing night & day at my High School anthology, & have done the toughest parts. I’ve written 2000 word introductions for each of the major periods—Anglo-Saxon, Middle English etc right up to 20th C—explanatory notes for the Chaucer and other early stuff, & now I’m going through the author introductions—did Spenser this morning.

Ryerson—Macmillan are very enthusiastic about the book so far, & feel that as the first survey anthology ever published in Canada it should have a brisk demand in all provinces.

Well, it’s fun to do, though it’s not as creative as writing a novel might be. One of these days I’ll catch fire on my novel & go at it hammer & tongs as I am on this.

There’s really no news to report since all I’ve done since getting back is apply my fat bum to the chair & write. I could tell you a lot about my Kingston experiences, but it seems a long time away now. Mary & I had fun—particularly one afternoon when she & I & Earle Birney & Morley Callaghan had several hours together drinking rye, & that same evening at dinner when Birney squirted grapefruit juice in Mary’s eye & we were all amicably ‘stewed’ together, & one evening

313. June 28, 1960

Layton is referring to Nowlan’s review (see 312.3).

Alden Nowlan (1933-83), Maritime poet (Bread, Wine and Salt 1967, I’m a Stranger Here Myself 1974), novelist (Various Persons Named Kevin O’Brien 1973), short story writer (Miracle at Indian River 1968), and playwright (Frankenstein 1976).

Alden Nowlan, rev. of A Red Carpet for the Sun by Irving Layton Fiddlehead 44 (spring 1960): 42-44.

Henry Moscovitch (b. 1941), Montreal poet, author of The Serpent Ink (1956) and The Laughing Storm (1961).

French: (literally: gray eminence), a confidential agent, especially one exercising unsuspected or unofficial power (nickname of Père Joseph, Cardinal Richelieu’s confidant).
at Malcolm Ross's place when we had fun with Frank Scott & Frank Underhill.³

I'm glad you liked the Fiddlehead. Donaldson⁴ & I have tried to improve the quality & the format--Fred Cogswell is very slap-happy as an editor.⁵ I'm sure the myth-makers won't outlive their generation, & Smith of course is a bandwagon critic (although a good one).

Did I tell you I'm to lecture at Carleton U next January on Sir Charles G.D. Roberts?⁶ Part of the "Living Tradition" series. And I've been put on the executive of the National Conference of Canadian Universities--along with Bissell⁷ & several other big shots. And effective Sept 1 I'm to become Dean of Graduate Studies here. So academically I'm now in the big time--but such things don't mean much sub specie aeternitatus.⁸

It was great to see you & Aviva again, & especially to meet Max for the first time. What a fine host he was that first evening! I'm amazed at his social & intellectual maturity. I felt we liked each other at once--I know I liked him! And how shapely & sprightly Aviva is! A joy just to look at her! And your lovely new apartment--I'm sure you're finding life so much happier & more creative in it.

Our love to you all--and deep apologies for not having written sooner.

As ever,

Des Pacey

¹Pacey refers to the Royal Society meetings; see 285.6.

²Our Literary Heritage; see 319.1.

³Frank Underhill, historian and political commentator, Professor of History at the University of Toronto, and later, at Carleton; principal author of the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation's Regina Manifesto of 1933.

⁴Allan Donaldson (b. 1928), Professor of English at the University of New Brunswick 1954-1993; author of a volume of short stories Paradise Siding (1980).

⁵See 297.8.

⁶See 337.13.

⁷Claude T. Bissell (b. 1916), scholar and editor, Professor of English at the University of Toronto 1947-56; President of Carleton (1956-58), President, University of Toronto (1958-71), author of The Young Vincent Massey (1981), editor of Our Living Tradition (1957).

⁸Latin: under the aspect of eternity (Spinoza).
314. July 5, 1960

Dear Irving,

Just a note to ask if you would be willing to review this booklet of Fred’s for the Fiddlehead. Anything from 300 to 1000 words would do—or just a brief mention if you think that’s all it’s worth.

Summer School lectures start today—1200 registered yesterday & more expected! What a grind.

Love to Aviva & Max.

Mary painting with Pinsky.

Love,

Des


315. July 12, 1960

Dear Desmond,

Your high school anthology sounds impressive; certainly the work you’re putting into it does. When is it to be published? Is that the same one you were telling me about in which Reaney, Klein, myself, etc, are to be represented in bulk? You have so many steaming and whistling kettles on the fire, I don’t which is the one that’s going off.

You’re also at work, aren’t you, on a book to be called *Ten Canadian Novelists*—or am I just inferring that from the article on Major Richardson which I saw in *Canadian Literature* and which, as I believe I wrote you, I enjoyed immensely?

You’re certainly this country’s leading literary historian. I can’t think of anyone to put beside you. Some weeks ago I met Watters of the Univ of B.C. I met him at the house of a colleague of mine, Mrs W. Francis—you may have seen the poem she wrote about me in the *Can Forum*.

He was affable, and most apologetic for not having included me in the Anthology he put out with Klinck. For the revised edition, he tells me he wants a large batch of poems as well as a couple of short stories. I’ll send him "Mrs. Polinov" and "A Plausible Story", both of which appeared in *Origin*.

Two days ago I had a "brainburst" and wrote six poems. Altogether I have about ten new poems you haven’t seen yet. This promises to be one of the best summers for writing, and if I can knock off some (three or four) more things of the order of "Keine Lazarovitch" or "I Know The Dark & Hovering Moth", my next book will be my best to date. So far I have 32 poems, of which more than half are what one calls "Anthology pieces", and the rest will do more than raise an eyebrow. Milton Wilson is printing "Sagebrush Classic" next month, and a collection of seven pieces the month after.
Now I have another collection of eight for him. So all goes well.

While I am writing immortal lyrics and satires, Aviva is working as an X-ray technician at the Montreal General Hospital and Max is making the neighbourhood happy by delivering cartons of beer from the local grocery store where he's working as a messenger boy. Since I've earned some money from the CBC for my talk on Assignment (did you hear it?) we'll pool our earnings and take a month's vacation; perhaps, in Vermont. Maxie has decided to go along with us, rather than take the motor trip with Betty to San Francisco. Of course this makes me happy, for both Aviva and I like having him with us. On the other side of the domestic ledger—I haven't seen Naomi for nearly six months, and I've almost forgotten what she looks like. B's fear and anxieties have rubbed off on Sissyboo and now she says she won't see me; hangs up the receiver when she hears my voice. It's heartbreaking, but there it is. Bet's so fearful Sissyboo might also want to come and live with me, she's filled her mind with her own phobias. Otherwise, why should the child refuse to see me? I've shown her nothing but love and concern. She's never heard an unkind word from me, and I'm sure the two or three ugly episodes between Bet and me that she witnessed wouldn't matter all that much.

When Maxie came to live with me, I insisted he phone his mother frequently and that he visit her at least once during the week—which he's done ever since coming here. I think it's monstrous that Bet hasn't set herself to remove whatever dark burr of prejudice has caught in S's mind: it's the one thing I find it hard to forgive her for; it's the one thing that's really unforgiveable.

C'est la vie! Well, that's good news about your being made Dean of Graduate Studies. Heartiest congratulations. I'm very very proud of you, and I'm sure all your other friends are also jubilant at your success. It's wonderful how you've been able to combine study, academic progress and solid literary achievement. Show me another D of GS who's got a book of short stories to his credit! I bet there isn't one. I take my hat off to you, Desmond. Mary must be proud of you too.

I got the Cogswell book, but I want to beg off from reviewing it. I can't say anything good about it, and I like Fred too much to want to hurt him by saying anything bad or merely tepid. Since I'm not a critic, I'd rather not criticize the work of my contemporaries, unless I can be honestly enthusiastic about their work. Two weeks ago the Book Page editor of the NY Times wired me, to ask whether I'd review half-a-dozen recent Am books of poetry. I wired back a prompt refusal. I think poets should write poems; too many of us have already fallen by the wayside. Anyway I'd rather review a good book of Cogswell's—why put me onto a mercilessly poor one?

Love,

Irving
PS The Editor of the Book Page of the Vancouver Sun asked me to write a 700 word article on the lot of the Canadian poet.1 If it appears I’ll send you a copy.

1Layton is thinking of the Pacey project which became Selections from Major Canadian Writers (see 319.1).

2Wynne Francis (b. 1918), Professor of English at Concordia University (appointed Professor Emeritus in 1993), author of Irving Layton and his Works (1984).

3Wynne Francis, "For Irving Layton (On Rereading his poems)," Canadian Forum June 1959: 69.

4See 5.19.


6See 5.53 and .54.


10Such a telegram is not included in the Layton Collection at Concordia University.


316. July 15, 1960

Dear Irving,

What gives? Why no letter? Any truth to rumours I hear that you’ve bought six stores & plan to live on the rents? Can we use your last group of poems—"Hostia", "After Theogius", "Prizes", "The Atonement" in Fiddlehead? If so, we will.1 Am still busy on my book—wrote the Keats introduction yesterday & hope to do Lamb today. Why don’t you come down here for a trip? Give my love to Max & Aviva.

Love,

Des Pacey

PTO

PS Jack McClelland sent me the ms of Patricia Blondal’s novel2 to read & appraise. It’s damned good—probably the most mature & sophisticated Can novel yet. McClelland was
also very pleased with my introduction to Mazo de la Roche’s Delight. 4
Mary is busy painting under Pinsky’s direction—some excellent figure studies.
I’m working too hard & am as tense as a bedspring—but it’s the only way I can work—all or nothing.


2Patricia Blondal (1926—59), Manitoba—born novelist, author of A Candle to Light the Sun (1960), and From Heaven with a Shout (1963).

3Patricia Blondal, A Candle to Light the Sun (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960).


317. July 19, 1960
Dear Desmond,
Your letter came yesterday, and I would have answered it immediately but I was working on "Maria Poidinger" and wanted to send it to you for Fiddlehead.1
But I did write you a long letter last week. Haven’t you received it yet? In it I begged off from reviewing FC’s book. Besides the reasons I advanced, I’m also reading Blondal’s book for Jack McC—-at least, Aviva is. I’ll plunge into it next week.
I’m writing furiously—my latest count makes it fourteen poems since the coming of summer. No barracudas as yet, but some nice tasty salmon and trout.
Jonathan Williams has asked me and the family to spend some time with him in Highlands, NC. Possibly we might motor down some time early in August. There I expect to write the two or three lollapaloozas I always seem to come up with during the summer. May Apollo be willing!2
Did you hear my Dominion Day address on Assignment? I’m still getting letters from it.
It’s not stores I bought, but apartments. I can’t live off the rents as yet, but it is my ambition one day to be able to do so. When I’m too old to do anything else. Which reminds me: Once I published The Long Pea-Shooter but now it’s The Swinging Flesh.3 I thought I’d better get that in before anyone else does.
Love to Mary and yourself.

Yours,
Irving


2In Greek mythology Apollo is the god of prophecy, music, healing and leader of the Muses of poetry.
Layton is playing on the phallic double-entendres contained in the titles of these collections.

318. July 22, 1960

Dear Desmond,

Here’s an improved version of "Maria Poidinger" and a poem I finished this morning, "For You". They’re both for The Fiddlehead. If you want my opinion of them—but of course you don’t!

This afternoon, Aviva and I take off for Boston for the weekend. Her cousin—Julius Marmur, the chap who split the chromosome—is putting us up in Cambridge. If I’m not careful, I might run into some Harvard professors of English. Did you see Frye’s review of A Red Carpet For The Sun in the annual report card of Canadian poetry? What he said seemed to cost him a considerable effort, I thought. Actually he’s much, much happier with the myth-and-mist poets like Reaney & Macpherson. The funniest thing he says in it is that my book lacks variety of tone. Some years ago in a letter to the CF I said that Frye was absolutely tone-deaf to verbal patterns of sound—he had a bad ear for poetry, was the way I put it. Others who know him will have since confirmed this. However, don’t let me cavil. Frye has changed with the times. He even included Dudek and Souster in his rostrum and now he feels there’s an altogether new wind blowing. He’s done an absolutely first-rate job as critic & commentator.

Love,
Irving

enclosure: ts "For You" and "Maria Poidinger" The Swinging Flesh 145, 140.

1See 316.1; published as "Song," in The Swinging Flesh 145.

2Julius Marmur (b. 1926), Canadian-born Professor of Molecular Biology and Biochemistry at Harvard (1956-60), Brandeis (1960-63), and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine (1963-92).

3"There is great variety of theme and imagery and mood, always touched with distinction, but little variety of tone." (448)

4"Even having a bad ear as Mr. Frye does hardly excuses his insensitivity to the rare beauty of phrasing of poem 95 of Europe, nor his failure to applaud with humility and gratitude the significance of its achievement."

5Layton refers to Frye’s "Letters in Canada: 1959:"
The fifties have been a rich and fruitful time: no other decade in our history has seen such variety and originality. Towards the Last Spike, Trial of a City, In the Midst of My Fever, The Boatman, A Suit of Nettles, The Cruising Auk: this is an extraordinary range of new discoveries in technique and sensibility, created at
every age level from the veteran to the newcomer. Victorian House, The Colour as
Naked, The Net and the Sword, Friday’s Child, Selected Poems (Souster), The
Transparent Sea and many others represent what may be called the resonance of
tradition. (458)

319.

July 25, 1960

Dear Irving,

First, while I remember--will you send back that
booklet of Fred’s, so I can try another reviewer?

Now, for your three letters & poems. The poems I like
very much, especially "Maria P", and "For You" (a nice light
rhythmical piece of joie de vivre), & I’m recommending that
we use these & "The Atonement" in Fiddlehead. The little
Hebrew squibs are clever but represent the side of you that
I like least--& don’t get mad, for there are lots of sides
of you I like very much.

I can’t seem to find your long letter of a week or so
ago on my desk--it must be at home. That is too bad, as I
know there were things in it I wanted to comment on. I
remember you asked just what book it was I was so busy on--
it’s the anthology for senior high school students, to be
published jointly by Ryerson & Macmillan, & including
English Lit from "The Wanderer" of 1000 A.D. to Dylan
Thomas, & American & Canadian lit of the 19th & 20th
centuries. I am hoping to have a group of your poems in it
--if you don’t ask too much for permissions!

I am also supposed to be editing Major Canadian Poets,
an anthology to go along with Ten Canadian Poets, & doing a
book on Ten Canadian Novelists, & I also want to do a new
edition of my Book of Canadian Stories--but all these things
have been temporarily laid aside while I do this school
text. I’m trying to make it a really fascinating book from
beginning to end, so that all but the dullest students will
be stirred to delight in literature. I think it’s going to
be quite cunningly done, with all sorts of interesting
internal balances & cross-references etc. It’s coming along
very well indeed.

Sorry you weren’t willing to review Fred’s book, though
I can understand your reluctance. I think one should have
more courage about refusing books for review--I always say
yes, but know I shouldn’t.

Did I tell you I read Blondal’s book for McClelland? I
liked it very much indeed--true to the region & universal
too--though a bit melodramatic in spots.

No, I missed your talk on Assignment. I hardly ever
listen to radio or TV nowadays--I’m always either writing or
reading. I haven’t even had a set of tennis this summer
yet, which is very unusual, for me. I usually play a lot, &
enter the NB Provincial Championships (best I ever did,
though, was make the semi-finals--I’m just a slightly better
than average club player.
So you've joined the ranks of the bourgeoisie! I expect you to write a poem soon attacking high real estate taxes & advocating a landlord's union.

Hope you had a nice weekend in Boston. You should have called Douglas Bush & Harry Levin—perhaps you did.

We go to Cavendish, PEI for our holidays, August 16-31. Have you ever been there? Magnificent scenery & miles and miles of sandy beaches & warm salt water! You should take a trip down & look us up.

Yes, I thought Frye's review of Red Carpet was rather grudging. I have a feeling that he doesn't really appreciate your poetry but thinks he should. But perhaps I'm unfair...I thought he rather overpraised George Johnston—he's not that profound—but it was nice of him to be so kind to Fred. Fred deserves some encouragement. He'll (Frye'll) be missed in that survey—he was always lively if not always right. But I can't really see him as a major critic—he has no creative talent of his own, & he's altogether too lacking in joie de vivre. He's an intellectual pure & simple, & no great critic has ever been purely intellectual. But he's erudite & clever as hell & maybe he'll prove the exception.

Had a note from Ralph Gustafson—he's coming to the Maritimes for his holidays & we hope to see him either here or on the island. Do you know him? Very genteel—but a good guy.

Mary's painting furiously—did a portrait of Philip this weekend & has done about four other figure studies of the children lately. She's temporarily off landscapes & still lifes & all for figures—and getting some very interesting colour & compositional effects.

I'd like to get back to my novel one of these days. When are you going to start your novel?

Love to yourself, Max, & Aviva.

As ever,
Des


3Harry Levin (b. 1912), Harvard Professor of English and Comparative Literature, author of James Joyce: A Critical Introduction (1941) and Reflections: Essays in Comparative Literature (1966).

4In his annual review of Canadian poetry for 1959, Frye discusses the work of Johnston and Cogswell:

The critic, however, has to explain that the substance of Mr. Johnston's poetry is not at all the image of the ordinary reader that is reflected from its polished surface. He must explain that seriousness is not the opposite of lightness, but of portentousness, and that genuine simplicity is always a technical tour de force. In short, he must insist that Mr. Johnston's most pellucid lyrics have to be read as carefully as the most baffling paper chase of E.E. Cummings.* (440)
The title poem and a few others that go with it add a new mythopoeic dimension to Mr. Cogswell's poetry... So far the versatility of Mr. Cogswell's talents has been more in evidence than their concentration, but the present volume is a remarkable achievement, and the general impression is one of slow and rich growth. (449-50)

Northrop Frye, "Letters in Canada: 1959" (Poetry).

Frye was leaving his position as chronicler of Poetry in the "Letters in Canada" annual survey, a role he had filled since 1951.

Ralph Gustafson, letter to Desmond Pacey, 18 July 1960, Pacey papers, National Archives of Canada.

320.

July 27, 1960

Dear Desmond,

I returned from Boston last night, after driving twelve hours with only two or three short breaks. The New England states are very lovely, and to go through them on a beautiful day such as we had yesterday is a sheer delight. My mood was lyrical all day, tho' I had to stop for a flat and found that two or three times I'd taken the wrong road. Boston is an altogether beautiful and exciting city, more so than San Francisco which I found too bland for my liking. I think if I lived anywhere in the USA it would be in Boston. Aviva has a cousin living in Cambridge; he's the geneticist who recently showed how the chromosome can be smashed & put together again. His wife is a reader for Simon & Shuster; if you get that novel of yours done I'd have her read it, and perhaps placed with her firm. The two make a fine pair and besides other things, we spent an afternoon with them on Crane Beach, about sixty miles away from Boston. There's nothing to compare with swimming in the salty ocean. Aviva and I had great fun.

As a general rule, I don't like literati, so I didn't try to see either of the gentlemen you mention. I met Louis at Kingston, when we were both there for the Humanities biz. We didn't say much to each other--what's there to say? I don't really care for "literature". I'm a poet, and for me poetry is Dionysian ecstasy. It's freedom, and power and revelation. It's the glowing coal, not the burnt-out clinker which is what most "literature" is. When I'm not mad and intoxicated, so that I feel I'm dancing on fire, I'd rather not talk about it at all. All I know is that I have strange visitations when I feel possessed of immense powers which are normally not my own: my life for the past eighteen years or so has consisted largely of waiting for these visitations, for it's then that I'm truly alive: exchanging polite enquiries or opinions about books and authors is nothing like that at all.

So, despite your subtle irony, I still think I'm right to refuse to review Cogswell's book. It's not a matter of courage, but of justice. I'd like to say good things about his work, for I think good things can be said about it: but this present book doesn't give me the chance to do so. If I
were a critic or a professional reviewer, I wd consider myself obligated to say something about it, let the chips fall where they may. But I’m not. The only obligation I have is to write poems—to write as many of them as I can and as well as I can. This obligation(?) I recognize and accept. There are too many poets setting themselves up as pundits; I have no aspirations towards punditry. I’ll leave all that to Ciardi, Rexroth, Shapiro, Dudek, Smith et al.

If you wish to see where I think a poet’s courage should lie, ask the CBC to send you a transcript of my Dominion Day talk for Assignment. With it I very probably buggered up my chance for a position (starting salary $6,100) at St John’s Military Academy. You might also write to the Winnipeg Free Press and ask them to send you the issue which featured Pat Benham’s interview with me. Or you might ponder the "anti-Jewish" drift of some of my recent poems, when I could take it easy and bask in the sunshine of my present acclaim by everyone. Do you know any other poet who so openly flouted the good opinions of those prepared to praise and accept him? Klein? Scott? Smith? Name one. Yet on the very eve of success, I sent you several poems, notably "Dining Out", and "Why Gurus Have Gray Eyebrows" which you and presumably The Fiddlehead considered too strong for publication. Anyhow, you wouldn’t risk it. In such things, does a poet’s courage lie—anyhow, for me!

What you say about Frye is true. If he’s not a great critic—in fact, not a critic at all—it’s because he lacks the emotional intensity, the delight and intoxication needed to make one. I always have the feeling he doesn’t really like poets or poetry, regarding them mainly as nuisances one must put up with because otherwise one’s learned books and essays won’t get written. He’s an ideologue, for that reason, not a critic. Compare him, say, with Lionel Trilling, or Edmund Wilson. Has he ever done a paper on a contemporary first-rate writer: Faulkner, Miller, or Lawrence? He lacks the quality that enables the great critic to get inside the blood & guts of a creator; all he has ever been able to do is to crawl around the exterior of his skull, with occasional penetrations into the cerebellum, the least important part of a writer.

I’m enclosing an improved version of "Maria Poidinger". Since Wilson says he doesn’t think "Prizes" fits the "classical" group he now holds for publication in the CF you can use it along with the other three. I’ll write him to send it back to me; that you’re using it in The F.

Aviva and Maxie send their love to you & Mary.

Always,
Irving

enclosure:"Maria Poidinger" (revised)

1Willicent ("Milly") Marmur, editor at Simon & Shuster.
2Layton declined the position at St John's Military Academy after learning of the Sir George Williams' appointment as poet-in-residence (see 287.3).


4Lionel Trilling (1905-75), literary and social critic, editor and Professor of English at Columbia; author of Matthew Arnold (1939) and The Liberal Imagination: Essays in Literature and Society (1950).
Dear Desmond,

That was a mighty bit of chest-pounding I did re my remarkable courage. Do please forgive me. Lots of emotions I simply try on for size. That's the worst about being a poet. When I'm dead someone, probably yourself, will tell me who I am, but by then it'll be too late.

I'm enclosing a tearsheet from the Winnipeg Press. In it I say pretty much what I say in my poem, "The Atonement."¹ The girl who interviewed me, Pat Benham, is doing her MA thesis on me.² She's a bright girl, and I hope she'll do her subject justice by making it a very lively one.

Have written several more poems, one, "Dance With A Watermelon,"³ a really fine thing. The Swinging Flesh now contains thirty-three poems and eight short stories. There's a chance Simon & Shuster will publish the book in the US.⁴ I've had an enquiry from their book editor, Mr W. Cole⁵ and I've sent him four stories and the last Tamarack Review.⁶ I'll let you know if anything else comes of it.

You're a good friend & a good man, and I wish you and Mary and the children a very happy vacation full of sunlight and joy.

All my love to Mary.

Aff'ly,

Irving

PS We leave for Highlands, N.C. this Thursday. Will write you from there. Love/Irv

enclosure: Pat Benham, Winnipeg Free Press, 16 July 1960, "Eichmann should make lecture tour, says poet."

¹See 316.1.


⁴This plan was not realized.


322. August 12, 1960
Dear Irving,
I don’t know when you’ll be back from N.C.—this is just a note to say we leave tomorrow for a two week holiday by the sea in PEI. Our address will be (from Aug 14-28): Cavendish Cottages, c/o Benson Graham, Bayview, PEI.
I am in the thick of marking Summer School exams, & I have just sent off the mss of my high school anthology—so am very tired & needy for a holiday. Thanks a lot for your letters, which I enjoyed—even your chest-thumping!

Love,
Des P

323. September 5, 1960
Dear Desmond,
I received your letter in the Highlands, just before I was setting out on my travels again. This time I took a different route, first motoring down to Charleston, and then coming up the coast on the Oceanic Highway. We slept on the beaches, Max, Aviva, and I, putting down our sleeping bags under the brightest stars and near the loudest pounding surf. A wonderful way to sleep. In the early morning, we plunged into the breakers and fought them until we were hungry enough to eat the clamshells the waves tossed onto the beach. We made it back to Washington where we slept under the same aromatic tree we had the first time we arrived in that city, three weeks earlier. From there we pushed on to NJ where we spent the night at Walter Lowenfels' place in May's Landing. I repaid his hospitality to the three of us by telling him the next morning he was a lousy poet, in fact, no poet at all, but one who had betrayed his vocation by letting himself be seduced by a love of power which he had gratified through Communist journalism and Communist heroics. It was a hard pill for him to swallow, with his wife & sister-in-law looking on, and Ben Davis, the present head of the CP of the USA with whom, by the way, I had had a rousing fight the previous night. Layton goes to make a call. Still, Lowenfels must have secretly agreed with my estimate of him and his career, for he begged me to put it all down in a letter so that he could have it before him while he was at work on his current book, a sort of autobiography. "Pound me," he said, "pound me. That's what I need."

Can you imagine a genuine poet saying that to anyone, as though he were clay or dough to be pounded into some shape?

A few hours' drive from Lowenfels, lives a true poet. The contrast between him and William Carlos Williams would strike even the least sensitive observer. Integrity, that's the first quality you feel about Williams: the man has lowered his forehead to neither cause nor country—he's been
himself, the unique individual each one of us was intended to be, but which the current pressures are making increasingly impossible. And the other quality is simplicity, a wonderful directness which left me wondering how many intrigues of the soul and indirections there must have been in his life to achieve it. We didn’t stay more than an hour, for he’s not well, having suffered three strokes, the last one leaving his right arm paralyzed and with a thickened speech. Both he and his wife, Flossie, were delighted with Maxie, and Williams invited him upstairs to see his working room. When we were outside, I asked Maxie what the great man had said to him when they were alone. "He asked me," said Maxie, "whether I needed to piss."

No doubt an unforgettable moment in my son’s life!

This has been a good summer. All counted I wrote about 22 poems, besides the "preface" to The Swinging Flesh. Did you see the current number of the Canadian Forum? There are seven poems of mine in it. Milton Wilson has five more which I’m hoping he’ll publish as a group. While I was in the Highlands, Jonathan Williams drove me down to Asheville, NC where I met the great-grandson of Herman Melville, himself a writer, and where I was able to see the first editions, manuscripts, clippings, etc of Asheville’s famous son, Thomas Wolfe, preserved and fluttered over by the librarian in the Asheville Public Library. The result of that pilgrimage is a poem titled "Librarian at Asheville." It’s quite a poem. So is another, called "The Fall." I think you’ll like both of them.

Well, I’ve gone on long enough. What about yourself? Did you and Mary and the kids have a good vacation? I bet Mary got in a lot of painting. How are your own projects coming along? Write me soon.

Love,
Irving

closure: ts "Librarian at Asheville" and "The Fall"

1Walter Lowenfels (1897—1976), American avant-garde poet, journalist and activist, an expatriate in Paris in the 1920s and persecuted in America in the 1950s; author of Finale of Seem (1929) and Steel (1937).

2Benjamin J. Davis (1903-64), elected National Secretary of the American Communist Party at its 17th Convention in December 1959; Davis twice held a seat on New York City Council and was jailed for sedition 1951-55.

3Florence ("Flossie") (Herman) Williams (1891—1976) married the poet in 1912.

4Irving Layton, "Foreword," The Swinging Flesh ix-xxv.

5See 315.8.

6Irving Layton, "Librarian at Asheville," The Swinging Flesh 180-81.
Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of September 5, and the enclosed poems.

Your safari into the southland sounds most romantic, especially the business of sleeping on the beaches in the sound of the pounding surf etc. I shall expect a few poems on that theme. And your treatment of the Communist poet sounds typical—you always were an obnoxious bastard and probably kicked your own mother as you emerged from her womb. Lay-it-on Layton! I’ve just thought of this little verse in your honour(?):

Don’t lay it on so, Layton
Flexing your biceps and calves——
A real poet’s graceful like Phaeton
Unobtrusively driving his cars!

Mary and I and the family had a very restful vacation on PEI. Our rented cottage turned out to be very spacious—four bedrooms upstairs, a big living-room with fireplace downstairs, and a small kitchen & bathroom. It was within two miles of the main beach at Cavendish, but quite secluded—hidden behind a thick patch of woods, though with a lovely view of the dunes & the sea. Mary did about seven oil paintings. The rest of us sat in the sun & read, or played tennis at a nearby court, or swam in the salt water. Our cottage was on a farm, & immediately in front of us was a field containing eight cows & one bull. The children soon learned the facts of life from watching the bull mount the cows. What a lovely sight that is! All the pride & grace in the world is concentrated in the bull at the moment of coition!

I was so exhausted by the effort I put into completing that high school anthology during Summer School that I haven’t had any energy yet for writing, apart from one or two reviews. I must get back to work as I have some urgent tasks ahead—Creative Writing in Canada has sold out, & I must prepare an enlarged & revised edition at once; I must finish my chapter for The Literary History of Canada; & I must do my lecture on Roberts for Carleton & my lecture on Canadian Culture in the 50’s for Bishops.

The CBC surprised me recently by writing for permission to read two of the stories from Picnic over the Trans-Canada network this winter. They are to read "The Boat" and "The Lost Girl".

An unexpected pleasure on Saturday was a visit from Henry Moscovitch & his friend Cohen. They stayed for a couple of hours & had tea in our garden—a nice pair of
lads, & Moscovitch especially a powerful personality. In fact Moscovitch struck me as very much a junior edition of you—a similar warmth of personality, forcefulness, self-confidence, & frankness.

I have just written a review of Brian Moore’s Luck of Ginger Coffey—a very readable but not very profound novel of Montreal life. I am about to write a review of Hugh MacLennan’s essays (he is so much better as an essayist than as a novelist!), & I have ahead of me reviews of Smith’s Oxford Book, several new volumes in the New Canadian Library, & David Walker’s new novel.

I have now taken on the job of Dean of Graduate Studies & am rather enjoying it so far. I have also moved into my new office in the new Arts Building—that was a hell of a job, packing & unpacking all my books & papers. Will try to write a more interesting letter soon.

Love,
Des Pacey

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1Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada 2nd edition, revised and enlarged (Toronto: Ryerson, 1961).

2Pacey, "Fiction (1920-1940)," Literary History of Canada 658-93.

3See 337.13.


6I have been unable to locate a Desmond Pacey review of The Luck of Ginger Coffey by Brian Moore or of Scotchman’s Return by Hugh MacLennan.


9I have been unable to locate a Desmond Pacey review of Where the High Winds Blow by David Walker.

10Pacey’s appointment as Dean of Graduate Studies was made official effective September 1, 1960.
Dear Desmond,

Excuse, please, my slowness in writing. Between a hellish fungoidal itch in my groin and Aviva's hay fever, I lost all appetite for civilized connection with the world. Also I was hard at work on my "preface" to The Swinging Flesh, which I have now brought up to a six-page affair. I think it's a better thing than the one I wrote for the Red Carpet. It says more & it says it better. Now that I have the entire day for writing, my head seems a great deal more lucid, with images & ideas coming and going, like birds and their springtime nest. I've made some revisions in the stories and poems, which now stand at nine and forty respectively. If Jack Mcclelland is true to his word, the book will be out by next spring. The quality of the poems & stories, together with the drift and writing excellence of the preface, ought to give this book an impact no other book of mine ever had, with the exception of the Red Carpet.

For the coming year I have a number of readings and lectures lined up, one possibly at Manitoba University for their Annual Arts Festival. They want me to give a talk, or a lecture, as well, but Christ, I feel I'm still too alive to turn myself into a Stephen Spender or a Herbert Read. Still, I may go along with them. There's still a lot of blasting powder left in me, and I might detonate one or two sticks of dynamite. Dartmouth in NH also is dickering to get me down, and some local organizations whose excited females expect my presence on the platform to do some things for them their husbands haven't been able to do for years. Together with my teaching at Sir GW all this should keep my tonsils in good working order.

I start lecturing this Thursday. I can't say I'm looking forward to it. Not this year. Writing is what I want to do, and when I'm not writing--living. This is a great & glorious world, with all sorts of wonderful things going on in it, and I begrudge every second that keeps me from experiencing them. Now that I don't teach in the blasted High School--what a miserable drudge I was!--I have the entire day to myself. I am my own master, and the time is my own to do with as I please. It's wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. From now on I intend to travel a great deal--go to Japan, China, the Middle East. Oh, I've got plans, plans. And every one of them realizable! You'll see, one of these days you'll get a postcard from me from the North Pole. Or an omelet from an ostrich egg.

What are you reading these days? I've started a book called Reason in Ethics by Stephen Toulmin. Very, very good. Also Rostow's The Stages of Economic Growth. Rostow is a brilliant young economist at the MIT and is reputed to be one of Kennedy's Brain Trusters. His main idea is that Am capitalism can be made to work more efficiently than it has under the Eisenhower regime through an extension & intensification of the New Deal measures of the Roosevelt era. This afternoon I re-read Byron's

October 2, 1960

325.
"Beppo," and "The Vision of Judgement". What damned nonsense has been written about B. He's no romantic at all, but a realist with a gift for satire which puts him beside Jonathan Swift and the Fielding who wrote the history of Jonathan Wild. Sic transit gloria mundi—there's the "romantic" theme of the younger Byron, and how very well he can say it too. Especially in the last two cantos of Childe Harold. But the satirist who wrote "Beppo" and Don Juan is in a class by himself and in that genre has no equal, not even Pope or Dryden. What a completely distorted view of Byron the schools and colleges present.

I also began Pasternak's Safe Conduct. It's his autobiography. I was particularly interested in what he had to say about his relations with Mayakovksy who was a very different kind of poet from himself. I should like to have known both of them, especially M. Have you read M's The Bed Bug? It's a glorious satire on the Soviet Bureaucracy which eventually drove him to his death. The most encouraging sign that present-day Russia is liberalizing itself is that repeated performances of The Bed Bug are allowed there.

Well, your promotion is good news. I congratulate you. You ought to make an excellent Dean, since you possess drive and lots of common sense. I wish you every success. It must give you a wonderful feeling of accomplishment, especially when it's coupled with all your other achievements—how many Deans, for example, have two stories of theirs taken by the CBC for broadcasting? The remarkable Desmond Pacey! All honour to you, my good friend. Mary must be very proud of you, as all your friends are.

I received Eli Mandel's book of poems. He's a fine poet—and also a very perceptive critic. Did you see the piece he did for the QQ? I thought it was excellent. He writes amazingly well. I suppose you saw the Times' review of Smith's Oxford Anthology of Canadian Verse, complete with pictures of Roberts, Pratt, Scott, and Smith himself. There are several inaccuracies in his introduction, especially bad is a howler which confounds the FS group with the Preview one, and lumps them both together. How on earth he cd make such a mistake is beyond me.

Aviva & my son are calling me to tea. Pre-midnight snack. All my love to Mary.

Yours aff’ly,

Irving

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1 This letter is probably misdated as Pacey responds to the news it contains in the following letter dated October 1; however, in 329 Pacey refers to this letter by date and does not question the date.

2 Irving Layton, "Foreword," The Swinging Flesh ix-xv.

3 Layton, "The Poet in Canada" (lecture) and poetry reading, Manitoba Arts Festival, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 7 & 8 Nov. 1960.
Sir Herbert Read (1893-1968), British poet and critic, one of the chief advocates of modern art movements in Great Britain, author of Form in Modern Poetry (1932) and The Philosophy of Modern Art (1952), known as a popular speaker in his later years.


Layton had lost his job at Herzliah High School; see 304.2.

Stephen Toulmin, An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1950).


Layton had lost his job at Herzliah High School; see 304.2.

Stephen Toulmin, An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1950).


Layton had lost his job at Herzliah High School; see 304.2.

Stephen Toulmin, An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1950).


Walt W. Rostow (b. 1916), American economic theorist and educator (MIT 1950-61; Texas at Austin 1969-76); special assistant to the President on national security 1966-69.


Henry Fielding, The History of the Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great (London: J Bell, 1755).

Latin: thus passes the glory of the world.

George Gordon, Lord Byron, Childe Harold, Complete Poetical Works II: 3-166.

Byron, Don Juan, Complete Poetical Works V: 1-662.


Safe Conduct 110-147.


Eli Mandel, Fuseli Poems (Toronto: Contact, 1960).


Layton refers to this passage from Smith's "Introduction:"

The other poets of the group were more firmly committed to a cosmopolitan tradition, and sometimes with irony and sometimes with more uncomplicated emotions they assimilated the methods of the symbolists and the modern metaphysicists.

During the war years of the forties poetry centred on little magazines in Montreal and on the West Coast, and the editors, the late John Sutherland, of First
Statement and Northern Review, and Alan Crawley, of Contemporary Verse, deserve great credit for their part in the contemporary revival. Among the poets themselves, an Englishman, Patrick Anderson, was a dynamic and inspiring source of energy. (xlvi)


326. October 1, 1960

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter, which began as if you were in the depths of depression and ended as if you were on the heights of ecstasy!

I must say that I got a certain malicious amusement out of your ailment. A fungoidal itch in the groin seems like a most appropriate disease for an overly-amorous poet! And when did you ever have a decent connection with the world anyway?

That Aviva has hay-fever is also faintly amusing—at any rate you are provided with a ready-made rhyme which I surely expect you to exploit in a poem.

O my Aviva!
She had hay fever,
And I had an itch in the groin!
Not an itch amorous
Nor an itch glamorous
But a fungoidal itch in the groin!

Your reading sounds singularly uninspiring. Fancy a poet reading a book on economics by a professor at MIT! And a solemn book on ethics! What are you trying to prove? That you are worthy of associating with deans of graduate studies & such stuffed shirts? I assure you that the game is not worth the candle. Strive as you may, we consign you to the outer darkness to wallow in the mud of ignorance. It is too late, my good sir, to win your way into the groves of academe: you are a poet, and an ignorant poet at that. Did you not wallow in the meretricious filth you have so constantly perpetuated. Gad sir, a sniff tells me that you belong by birth and breeding to the great unwashed!

What’s this about you lecturing at Sir George Williams? Have you crept into that academic fold? Or are [you] simply referring to your evening classes—which are, of course, strictly non-U?

Life has been very hectic here of late, & if I sound slightly wacky in this letter it is because I am fed up with the constant solemnity of deaning it about the campus. My schedule during the past two weeks has been killing—oral exams of MA, MSc, & PhD candidates almost every day, meeting my first classes, attending meetings of the Board of Deans & other committees, judging the Freshman Queen (there’s a nice irony?), attending the Freshman Banquet, addressing the
staff of the college newspaper, preparing lectures, greeting new graduate students, writing letters to graduate students who were delayed in or prevented from coming, getting settled in my new office, taking over & filing all the graduate school records, breaking in my new secretary (my late great friend & colleague Graham Mackenzie used to say that a secretary was not really permanent until she had been screwed on the floor), & in between times reading & reviewing A.J.M. Smith's *Oxford Book of Can Verse* (for QQ) & four new volumes of the New Canadian Library, & Brian Moore's *Luck of Ginger Coffey*, & Hugh MacLennan's *Scotchman's Return*, & David Walker's *Where the High Winds Blow*, & Robin Harris's *Bibliography of Canadian Education*.2

If I ever write a creative word again it will be a miracle of the first magnitude. I can see already that I have been caught in the administrative net and that I shall spend most of my time writing memos. What perverse vanity is it that leads us to seek the hollow prizes of presidencies & deanships at the expense of our creative souls?

Well, you see that I am in danger of reversing your pattern & ending in depression! But I shall fool you, for I intend now to retail a piece of very good news. Mary learned two days ago that she has won one of three purchase prizes in the Maritime Art Association's Travelling Exhibition—which means that her painting is bought & presented to one of the governments of the Atlantic Provinces to hang in a public building. And, also, a lovely painting she did this August of Michael (7) in a field of goldenrod has been accepted for the Fall Show of the Beaverbrook Gallery—and Bruno Bobak,3 one of the jury, told me confidentially that he considered it one of the very best paintings in the show. So if old man Pacey is through as a creative being, his esteemed spouse is just entering into her great creative epoch!

Love & kisses to all three of you!

Des Pacey

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3Bruno Bobak (b. 1923), appointed official war artist attached to the Canadian army in 1944, artist-in-residence at UNB from 1960. Bobak's oils, watercolours and woodcuts are represented in the Library of Congress in Washington and the National Gallery of Canada.
Dear Desmond,

I wanted to reply earlier than this to your very good letter of Oct 1st. It's been one thing after another, though. The CBC asked me to do something for Project 61. You may have heard the program yesterday--"The Frightening Sixties."1 I was host and commentator. It meant going up to Toronto last week for two days, and interviewing some McGill students the week before. Don't worry, I don't propose to make this my means of earning a livelihood. A program here or there is all right, but I don't want to be counted among the lost souls that wander through the corridors of the CBC building on Jarvis Street. One chap whom I met for the first time said he envied my having been fired from my job and wished the same thing would happen to him. Some years ago he wrote a novel and had it published in England by Secker and Warburg. It's called This Side of Holman's Hill.2 Have you read it? It's by Frank Freedman.3 He says he hasn't the courage to part company with a job that enables him to support a wife and two children and to pay off a mortgage on a house he recently bought. If, however, someone took it into his head to bounce him out on his ear, he'd almost welcome it like a condemned prisoner a reprieve. Meanwhile he goes on eating his heart out, counting the stacks of novels he'd write were he free to do so. I wrote him the other day reminding him of Anthony Trollope.

When I got back from Toronto, I had to leave almost directly to meet my classes at Sir George Williams. On Thursday, I exercise my vocal apparatus for four solid hours, since the Administration decided I should have my two classes on the same evening. My first one is on The Appreciation of Poetry, and the one that follows it is called Creative Writing—a sort of poetry workshop. Both classes, thank heaven, are stimulating me this year. In my poetry workshop there are more than half—a—dozen practising poets, several of whom have had things published in the Canadian Forum and elsewhere. They're about the best group I've had, since I began giving this course. The students give me their poems and I rip them apart and this weekly event allows me to give free play to my sadism. All the same they are picking up lots of invaluable tips from me, one of my students, a housewife, Gertrude Katz,4 having had one poem accepted by Milton Wilson for the Can Forum,5 and another by your own Fiddlehead.6 Ca va, mon ami.

This Sunday night I had a huge party at my place. More than forty people. It seemed as if Noah's Ark had come to rest corner Somerled & Wilson. By all accounts it was a great success, everyone having enough to eat & drink, and enough new faces before which to display their own. One mishap—someone swiped Aviva's precious bottle of perfume from the bathroom shelf. I tell Aviva that was the thief's
way of saying she thought the party stank, but my witticism doesn't seem to console her for the loss and I'm afraid I'll have to go out and get another bottle to replace the stolen one. An added implication to the mystery is that we had a transvestite among the guests, and we are wondering whether the missing scent leads to his shaven armpits or not.

Frank and his wife, Marian, were also present. He told me a Canadian university was interested in setting up a post of poet-at-large, and that he had dropped my name to the committee. I thanked him and said I wanted none of that. That's all right for old geezers like Robert Frost, and for young ones like Richard Eberhart et al, but I don't wish to become a tamed university pet so early in my career. I want to grow wilder and fiercer, with my flame controlled to the discipline of a blow-torch. Now that I've escaped teaching, I shall never again return to it, unless the direct necessity forces me to. Luckily, I have been entrusted with a good share of my mother's realism and have saved my money and invested it wisely. I have no intention of being a "starving genius" and getting my carcass thrown into a pauper's grave like Mozart. I'll see the world rot in hell first!

Tomorrow I'm going up to Queen's to give a reading there at the invitation of Malcolm Ross. It should be fun. Malcolm wants me to meet with the graduate students, and I think he's planned one of his parties. I hope he's invited a couple of seductive and seducible co-eds, firm-breasted and golden-thighed. Now that the itch in my groin has left me, it's been replaced by another, an altogether normal one except for its intensity which can only be assuaged by a sea of rolling white bosoms and buttocks. But this is no way to talk to a "Dean of Graduate Studies" for like the reformed Prince Hal you'll tell your Jewish Falstaffian friend to take his lecherous visions elsewhere. Not for you the hairy doughnut! Or the erect nipple guarding its approaches like pink sentinels. Let all your thoughts be wise and constructive—for you, henceforth, let all black-and-whites be those of paper, not passion. Not for me are your puritanical fevers—I shall wallow all my life in the ignorance you've condemned me to, while about me whirl arms, legs, breasts, and buttocks. However, while pillowed by the loveliest snow-white bosom I could pick up for that purpose in the city, I read the following books which I now warmly recommend for perusal—minus the bosom, of course! *Man in Modern Fiction* by Edward Fuller, and *Vision and Rhetoric* by G.S. Fraser. If you've not read them, I suggest you do so—quite humbly as befits a lowly, ignorant poet to a Dean of Graduate Studies (DOGS). That's what you've gone to—to the DOGS. Have you seen Mordecai Richler's article in the latest *Macleans*? He makes the same points I've been lately making, and I'm glad he's courageous enough to do so. His article ought to make the British squirm!

Say, that's good news about Mary's success. Please tell her how delighted I am for her and that I share all her
happiness. Both of you are up there with the gods where the
sun is perpetually shining. Old man Pacey through with
creative writing? Nonsense! Not as long as there is juice
in your jeans and joy in your juice!

Love,
Irving


3. Frank Freedman (b. 1923), CBC writer and novelist, author of *This Side of Holman's Hill*.


7. Marian (Dale) Scott, (1906—93), Montreal painter whose work has appeared in solo
exhibitions across Canada; represented in public and private collections including the National

8. Robert Frost was appointed Ralph Waldo Emerson Fellow in Poetry at Harvard 1939-40;
Ticknor Fellow in the Humanities at Dartmouth in 1943 (remaining affiliated with Dartmouth until
1949), and Simpson Lecturer for life at Amherst College in 1949.
In September 1952, American poet Richard Eberhart was appointed poet-in-residence at the
University of Washington, at the University of Connecticut 1953-54, at Wheaton College 1954-55,


10. Layton alludes to the protagonists of Shakespeare's *The History of Henry the Fourth* and
*The Second Part of Henry the Fourth*.

11. Edmund Fuller, *Man in Modern Fiction: Some Minority Opinions on Contemporary American


328. October 24, [1960]

Dear Irving,

Are you sulking, or what? I keep expecting a letter
from you, & none appears. I hope you are not ill.
I finally completed the index for *Creative Writing*, &
am now half way through the galley proofs for the *Stories*.
I go to Toronto on Nov 3, but find I have only fifteen
minutes in Montreal on the way up. On the way back on
Monday, Nov 6, I may have an hour or so about suppertime.
Will let you know later.
Then on Nov 11, I go up to Ottawa with Mary. If the weather is still good, our plan is to drive as far as Montreal on Saturday the 11th, & go on to Ottawa on Sunday morning. Coming back, we’d leave Ottawa Wednesday afternoon, spend Wed night in Montreal, & come on home on Thursday. So if this arrangement holds we should be able to have two get-togethers.

But hurry up & write. I love getting your letters, even your angry ones.

Love to Aviva!

As ever,

Des P

329. October 26, 1960

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your long & good-humoured letter, which it was a joy to receive. I was beginning to wonder whether my facetiousness about your itchy groin and Aviva’s hay-fever had offended you!

I see that in your letter of October 2 (which I couldn’t locate when I wrote to you last) you speak about A.J.M. Smith’s Oxford Book of Canadian Verse. I reviewed the book for Queen’s Quarterly, and began by saying (quite honestly) that I thought it was a pity that Smith had been commissioned to edit the book, and that I should have liked to see what RoyDaniells, Malcolm Ross, or you would have done with such an anthology.1 I feel that Smith’s particular prejudices have been allowed to dominate Canadian poetry for too long. I think some of the things he says in his "introduction" (as you point out) are quite absurd. I’m especially against his last paragraph, in which he talks of "the characteristics of modernity" as being complexity, obscurity etc.2 He’s about twenty years out of date! The new poetry of England at any rate is not complex, allusive, erudite, & metaphysical. And I am very glad to see that English critics such as Graham Hough3 and Alvarez4 are saying what I have been saying for years—that poetry should be the direct & straightforward transcription of experience, and not a kind of academic parlour game.

The practical results for Smith’s anthology are such things as giving Isabella Vallyancy Crawford more space than either Carman or Roberts, and the omission of Cogswell, Johnston, Nowlan, Moscovitch, etc.

Why the hell doesn’t someone beside me get up the courage to question Smith’s omniscience? Fred Cogswell & I, as far as I can determine, are the only ones who ever point out any flaws in Smith’s anthologies.5 To everyone else, he’s a tin god.

Mary & I would like to come up to Montreal for a weekend soon, and we should especially like to come up before the Van Gogh exhibition closes on Nov 6.6 There had been talk of a reduced fare UNB excursion on the weekend of
Nov 4-6, but not enough signed up to make that feasible. We still may come in any case.

You haven’t sent in any poems to read lately. I hope you are not running out of steam. I am still too immersed in administrative chores to do any real writing, but things should soon improve. Last Wednesday I made my debut as a Latin orator at the Fall Convocation, & received many congratulations. I was scared stiff beforehand, but rather enjoyed the actual performance.

Yours sincerely,
Des Pacey

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Pacey refers to the opening comments in his review:

My first reaction on seeing this book was to regret that A.J.M. Smith had been chosen to edit it: not, I must hasten to say, because I doubt Smith’s ability, but because he has already given us his Book of Canadian Poetry and it would have been interesting to see what another editor could do. Even after reading the book, and acknowledging that Smith has avoided a mere duplication of his former excellent anthology, I am still curious to know what Roy Daniells or Malcolm Ross or Irving Layton would have made of the assignment.

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The final paragraph of Smith’s "Introduction" states:

The bewildering multitude of scientific, moral, and metaphysical data with which the poet must now come to terms, and the burden of guilt, fancied or real, which the disintegration of values in religion, politics and morals places on his unsupported shoulders, make it very difficult, if not impossible, for him to be anything but complex, divided, erudite, allusive, and sometimes obscure. These, of course, are the characteristics of modernity in the poetry of Europe and the United States as well as of Canada.


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A(1fred) Alvarez (b. 1920), British critic, senior research scholar at Oxford University (1952-55), visiting lecturer at Princeton University (1955-58), poet and novelist; as a critic (Beyond all this Fiddle: Essays 1955-1967, The Savage God: a Study of Suicide (1971), Alvarez was influential in bringing attention to the work of the young poets Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath and Thom Gunn.


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330. Wednesday am [November 2, 1960]

Dear Irving,

A hurried note to say that Mary & I have decided to come up to Montreal this weekend to see the Van Gogh Exhibition, Philip, and our friends. We are driving, & hope to hit Montreal on Saturday morning & leave again Sunday afternoon. Don’t make any party arrangements, as we’d
prefer to have a very informal visit. Perhaps we could have lunch together on Saturday & then a chat that afternoon. Anyway, we’ll phone you Saturday morning all being well.

As ever,

Des P

331. 5731 Somerled Ave, Montreal, Que

November 2, 1960

Dear Desmond

Just a hurried note to say how delighted I am to hear that you and Mary are thinking of coming to Montreal this weekend. You’re welcome to stay at my place for as long as you care to, we can quite easily accommodate you. The Van Gogh exhibition is certainly worth seeing and travelling the distance for. And all your friends here will be glad to see you again.

The only fly in the ointment of general happiness is that I myself shall be leaving for Winnipeg on Sunday to take part in the Manitoba Arts Festival. I’m scheduled to give an address on "The Poet in Canada" and a reading to the students the following day. Prof Maurer is the chap I’ve been in communication with. I suppose you know him or of him. There was a poem of his—a translation of Rilke—in the current issue of The Fiddlehead.

I’m writing like a bugger, stories and poems. You’ll see three new poems in the Can Forum next month, and possibly a short story, a very revised and excellent version of the one I sent you. It’s probably the strongest thing I’ve ever done. And yesterday I took a thing I did about ten years ago, and re-wrote it into a very moving short story. It’s coming, it’s coming.

I’ve got a date with the Income Tax Office. Maybe I can get some returns. Wish me good luck.

Love to Mary.

Affectionately,

Irving

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2 Layton, poetry reading, Manitoba Arts Festival, 8 Nov. 1960.

3 K.W. Maurer (b.1920), Professor of English at the University of Manitoba.


6 Layton, "Osmeck," see 336.7.
Dear Irving,

Just a hurried note to thank you for your kindness to Mary & me during our brief visit to Montreal last weekend. I'm afraid I was so delighted & exalted to be with you that I quite forgot to thank you for the beer & the rye & the supper. Also, I had meant to pay for your lunch--but that cafeteria system frustrated my good intentions.

Please thank Aviva for me too. The supper she prepared was tremendously appetizing & satisfying. And Mary & I both thought that Aviva was looking radiantly beautiful & happy.

Give our regards to Max. It was good to see him again & to hear his merry laugh. Wish we could have had more of his guitar & singing!

I hope that all your best expectations of the Winnipeg do were realized. I am sure you would be a resounding success. Were there any nice undergraduates displaying their milky thighs?

I don't know what association of ideas leads me to say next that Mary was delighted with your goodbye kiss! I verily believe you have an aphrodisiacal kiss!

We left Montreal Sunday afternoon about 3, and got as far as Rivière du Loup that night--at about 10. We stayed overnight there in a brand new motel, & had a most amusing hour before bed talking & laughing with the Bobaks.¹

We arrived in Fredericton about 1:30 on Monday, having been delayed for about an hour by a flat tire which occurred only about 35 miles from home. However, I was in time for my Creative Writing class that afternoon from 2:30 to 5:30.

Tuesday I had lectures continuously from 9 to 5, but last evening we relaxed by going to hear a very fine male chorus—the Icelandic Singers. The baritone soloist was terrific--& looked very like you.

Today I have been busy all day with business letters, memos, etc--& tonight I have meetings of the University Council & Board of Deans. So you see how little time I get for writing these days!

We hope that you will follow our lead & get in the car some day & drive down here. It is really not a bad trip, & having such lively friends to talk to at the other end makes the journey quite worthwhile.

A story arrived today from John Mills but I haven't yet had time to read it.

Meanwhile, all the best & thanks again!

Love,

Des P

¹Molly Lamb Bobak (b. 1922), official war artist with the Canadian army (1945-46), instructor at UNB’s Art Centre from 1960, author of *Wild Flowers of Canada: Impressions and Sketches of a Field Artist* (Toronto: Pagurian, 1978).
November 17, 1960

Dear Desmond,

I better get this off to you before you think my critics have slaughtered me. Each time I have wanted to sit down to answer your fine letter, something has cropped up and stopped me from doing so. Since I got back from Winnipeg, we’ve been entertaining out-of-town guests—you seem to have started the avalanche! Last night Nathan Cohen—a lovable duffer, if an egomaniac—was here for supper. We talked about Fighting Words for the entire two hours he was here, so that after a while I began to think my own personality a mere extension of NC’s program. Or that is, I would, if I didn’t have a somewhat well-developed ego of my own. But I do the great man an injustice! He didn’t always talk about Fighting Words; there were times when he talked about Encounter, another program he’s currently running! For all that I like Nathan—he’s not real. He’s somebody’s creation—author unknown, perhaps a Jewish Dickens of the 19th century who cast the ghostly outlines which Cohen is now corpulently filling out. That wd make a good story—don’t you think?

Last weekend, the Colombos visited me. I call him Colombus because he discovered my "genius". You probably didn’t see the article he wrote in defense of me against the attacks of a certain ill-educated lout who goes by the name of Nathaniel Benson. In it, Colombo says I’m a genius, etc, etc. A wonderful reference, which will now get me unlimited credit at the bank. Anyway, he’s a very intelligent chap and his Jewish wife, Ruth, is a warm-hearted, attractively plump woman who had my finger itching to pinch her in all the right places. We all spent a pleasant evening of talk, in which Frye’s Anatomy of Criticism came in for the usual raking by me, with Colombo, who has taken courses with Frye, putting up a feeble defense against the cataract that descended on him. I was at my vituperative best.

Probably my visit to the University of Manitoba had something to do with making me angrier than usual at the mention of Frye’s name. There I met several lecturers who were former students of his. They all talk that archetypal crap, and since I had a chance to speak to the students personally I was able to see & hear for myself, the effects of Frye’s pernicious nonsense. That man has ruined a whole generation of English lecturers, besides balling up two very gifted poets, Reaney & Macpherson. The best article against Frye that I’ve seen is one Whalley wrote, a review of his book which appeared I think in TR. It has endeared him to me ever since.

My visit to U of M was a triumphal procession. Seriously. The Chancellor of the University, Justice Freedman, followed me from one place to another, from
private party to lecture to reading. It was love at first
sight. The head of the English Department gave a luncheon
at which I met all the members of his staff. The discussion
was lively, and only broke up when Dr Wheeler suggested
that I be given an hour of rest and quiet before the
reading. The evening before I gave my talk on "The Poet in
Canada." It was so well received I got a standing ovation
when I finished speaking. It moved me greatly. For the
reading, the entire auditorium was packed with people
standing at the back and at the doorways. John Peter introduced me. Do you know him? Despite his waspish review
of Red Carpet in Reaney's newly-launched Alphabet, we got
on famously. After the reading, he asked me whether I
wished him to eat his review. I laughed, and told him if he
lived long enough, he'd write a better one. Two days ago I
rec'd his book on Milton's Paradise Lost. The following
inscription in it speaks for itself:

For Irving Layton
lightning-conductor extraordinary,
in gratitude for many things.
I didn't see Chester Duncan!

Leonard Cohen is back. He looks slimmed down, has lost
that fat Jewish boy look, looks rugged. The novel he wrote
while in Europe has apparently been turned down by
McClelland & Stewart--too sexy: "Hot, but no plot"--is how
I'd characterize it in the light of what both Jack
McClelland and Leonard have told me about it. The action
goes from bedroom to bedroom and ends in the bathroom.
Since Leonard was depending on the returns he expected the
book to bring him, its rejection is something of a blow.
However, he phoned me yesterday to say he's completed a one-
act play and he's starting on another novel. For his own
happiness, I feel, he must work steadily. He has a nature
that can easily go astray, precisely because it is so well-
endowed:

"And husband nature's riches from excess."
Shakespeare's Sonnet 94

I've finished revising two more early stories of mine:
"Unemployed" and "A Game of Chess." Both of them have
come out well. Now I have ten stories that I'm really
pleased with. I think I've created a dozen or so characters
in them that are authentic individuals. I'm sending the
book to the publishers next week. After that I'll settle
down to writing some more short stories--perhaps a novel.
It's fun making characters crawl out of pen and ink.

Aviva is pleased you like her cooking and think she's a
good cook. It was very pleasant seeing you and Mary and
Philip. Come again--come as often as you can. As for my
aphrodisiacal lips: you ain't seen nothing yet!

All my love to Mary. She did look irresistably
beautiful.

Love,
Irving
Dear Irving,

Thank you for your very interesting letter telling me about your impressions of Manitoba and about your various visitors.

November 22, [1960]

334.


1CBC Television program founded and produced by Nathan Cohen in 1959.

2John Robert Colombo (b. 1936), editor (Colombo's Canadian Quotations 1974, Colombo's Canadian References 1976), a member of the editorial board of Tamarack Review, journalist, translator and poet.

Ruth (Brown) Colombo (b. 1936).


Nathaniel Benson (1903-1966), journalist, and playwright.


6Hon. Samuel Freedman (1908-), Justice of the Manitoba Court of Appeal 1960-83; Chancellor of the University of Manitoba (1959-68).

7Dr. Wheeler, Professor of English, University of Manitoba,

8John Peter (1921-84), critic, Professor of English, University of Manitoba (1950-61); University of Victoria (61-84); author of Along that Coast (novel; 1964) and Vallor (short stories; 1978).

9John Peter, rev. of A Red Carpet for the Sun by Irving Layton, Alphabet 1 (Sept. 1960): 84.


11See 124.4 & .5.

12Cohen's novel, originally titled Beauty at Close Quarters (see 288.5), was rewritten and published as The Favourite Game (see 457.1).


14See 333.12.


16See 151.4 and 331.7.
I always found Winnipeg a very lively place, and there is, as you are reported as saying, an unusually close liaison between the university and the general public. Of course this is true of all the western universities, largely I think because they were all founded as state universities rather than, like most of those in the east, by religious sects or by private wealth. Another factor of course is the more democratic spirit of the west.

However, although Winnipeg always attracted me, I had a feeling its surface was better than its depths, that it seemed to be interested in poetry & the arts but never produced much of them. What genuine writing or painting has ever come out of Winnipeg? Well, I suppose Adele Wiseman & Gabrielle Roy\(^1\) and the author\(^2\) of *Under the Ribs of Death*\(^3\) -- which I suppose isn't bad for such a young city. But I still have the feeling that there's a kind of passive dilettantism about that intellectual atmosphere, an interest in talking about the arts rather than doing much about them -- & that the people who seem to be most interested in the arts are really much more interested in making money on the Grain Exchange or the Stock Market.

I have been incredibly busy since getting back: two or three committee meetings every day, a meeting every evening, budgets to prepare for both the English Dept & the School of Graduate Studies, the new Calendar of the latter to prepare & see through the press etc. The result is that I get almost no time for reading or writing, which is absurd. However, I did have a free evening and on that I wrote the story which I am enclosing.\(^4\) It is just the first draft and doesn't satisfy me. I think there is the germ of a good idea here, but I haven't treated it properly, I know. I do not send it to you as a means of fishing for compliments, but to get your suggestions for its improvement. I have some ideas myself, but I won't prejudice the case by presenting them.

I do think that the story could be transposed into a good television play, and think I shall have a shot at that one of these evenings.

Tonight I am taking the evening off to go and see the Red 'n Black Revue. I hear that one of the featured skits is called "The Return of Desmond Pacey," so I am expecting to have all my eccentricities & pretensions mercilessly lampooned.

Love & kisses,
Des Pacey

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1 Gabrielle Roy (1909-83), Canadian novelist (*Bonheur d'occasion* translated as *The Tin Flute*, 1947) and short story writer.


Dear Desmond,

I’d better get this off to you before I leave for Dartmouth College. That’s for the scheduled reading this Friday evening. Aviva is coming along with me, but Maxie has a final exam, and can’t make it with us. He’ll have the house all to himself and for his guitar-strumming friends. He takes lessons in that instrument and fancies himself a budding Segovia—though now and then he has visions of rolling them in the aisles with a hillbilly ballad or a folksong. His teacher says he’s talented, and certainly every spare moment he’s got he can’t keep his fingers off the strings. I’ve had him read Plato’s Apology, and now he’s on The Phaedo. Also he’s joining a former student of mine, Leonard Angel, in reading and discussing Hume’s work in a sort of informal philosophy seminar I hold every second Friday. Angel is a young chap, under sixteen, who’s just completed a treatise showing that the Logical Positivists and the Existentialists aren’t as far apart in their epistemological views as is commonly supposed. Quite an impressive work—considering his youth!

Have you seen Dudek’s Literature and the Press? It was published by the Ryerson Press. I leafed through a copy at the bookstore this morning. It looks a very solid work—it’s his doctoral thesis. If the price weren’t so high ($5.00) I’d buy it. Maybe he’ll remember me and send me an inscribed copy.

Both Milton Wilson & Robert Fulford like my Osmeck story, and it now looks as if it’s going to appear in the Feb issue of the Can Forum along with four new poems. Now that the book is off to the publishers, I have that anticlimactic feeling, that drained, empty feeling—all fucked out! You’ve probably experienced it too, several times. I feel like giving myself a long, long rest from writing, but I know I shan’t since I begin to feel guilty & restless if I don’t put something down on paper. What a stupid way of living, when there’s so much to be looked at and enjoyed. Still, writing is an enjoyment too, though of a different kind. I had fun creating the four or five characters in my last two short stories. And when a poem begins to take shape—that is ecstasy.

Henry Kreisel was in town last week and came to supper. We spent a delightful evening with him. One of the things we talked about was the pros and cons of university teaching for the creative writer. He’s certainly aware of the dangers, but on the whole, he thinks the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. His salary next year will be $12,000 per annum. An argument like that will silence all but the most stubborn opposition. Still, can you imagine a Faulkner or a Hemingway in a university? But maybe that’s a vanishing breed, one that no longer reflects the changed conditions.
under which we live. Who feels like setting out for dangerous, unexplored shores? And if one does, is anyone interested in its description? Does the whole bizarre adventure of consciousness still mean anything? If so, to whom? To a mere handful, and their numbers growing smaller with each passing day. I just read an account of the prosperity of West Germany, and how the citizens of that fortunate land zestfully pursue the good, and commodities—Mercedes cars, TV sets, Hi-Fis, etc—pouring in ever-growing quantities from the conveyor belts, and it has set me thinking. However, as a virtuous Canadian, I’ll spank myself for entertaining unwholesome thoughts about man’s probable future on this planet—if I don’t, you will—and resolve to think only optimistically, positively.

I’m glad Kennedy made it, though it was a tight squeeze. The gods have been kind, and given America another chance. I anticipate many stellar changes both in the foreign & domestic policies of the United States. If the Americans weren’t so brainwashed & bamboozled they’d impeach Eisenhower for leading their country into its present disgraceful condition. Kennedy will have some plain speaking to do to his bemused compatriots—I think he has the guts to do it. For all that the intellectuals say, Kennedy, not Stevenson, is the better man. I have the feeling he’ll go down before he’s through, as one of the truly great Presidents, of that select company that includes Jefferson, Lincoln, Wilson and Roosevelt.

Your story has an interesting idea, and I think you’ve worked it out very well. I have only one criticism to offer. It seems to me that what you’ve written is only the outline of the story, that you still have to clothe it with flesh and blood. It’s too schematic. Your figures haven’t been individualized, but are made to serve an abstract idea. Your dialogue strikes me as terribly bare, terribly mechanical, as though the words were not spoken by humans but by lifeless creatures uttering stock speeches, stock responses. In short, I think the chief defect is that you appear to have thought up the idea first and then used characters and dialogue to illustrate it. However, the idea is a good one, and you extract all the humour and philosophy you can from it. I certainly would like to read it again in its re-worked form.

Love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving

1See 325.5.

2Andrés Segovia (1893–1987), Spanish musician acclaimed as the foremost guitarist of the twentieth century.

3Leonard Angel (b. 1945), philosopher and playwright, co-editor of Cataract magazine, Professor of Philosophy at Douglas College in Vancouver, author of The Silence of the Mystic (1983) and Enlightenment East and West (1994).
Logical Positivism and Existentialism are alike in that they believe "Philosophy is not a theory but an activity" (Wittgenstein, Tractatus). Logical positivists stress that the aim of this activity is to make propositions clear; for existentialists, notably Karl Jaspers, the aim is the achievement of human Being--philosophy is an activity by which the individual finds and becomes himself.


Dudek's doctoral thesis was completed at Columbia in 1955.


John F. Kennedy, the Democratic candidate, won the Presidential election held on November 8, 1960, becoming the 34th President of the United States.

[s.c.]: "fan mail" (nineteen letters of thanks and admiration addressed to Irving Layton).

December 9, 1960

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of November 30, and your further missive: a collection of your fan mail. I am not sure what you want me to do with the latter. Do you want me to keep it as part of my Irving Layton collection, to read it & return it, to match it with my fan mail, to paper my living-room with it, or to wipe my arse with it? Pardon my vulgarity: I shall preserve the papers in my safe rather than my bathroom until I hear from you. As one of your poems had it--holding it in, holding it in!1

Thanks also for your notes on child raising. Your story about Maxie's reading of Plato (in the original Greek, I presume) reminds me of an encounter I had twenty years ago with F.R. Leavis & his son (then aged about 4½).2 Leavis was riding his bike, & had the little guy on the crossbar. I also was on my bike. We met outside the University Library in Cambridge, & courteously alighted to pass the time of day. Wanting to make conversation, and noticing that the little Leavis held a book in his hand, I said "Well, little man, what are you reading?"

I of course expected him to reply Mary Had a Little Lamb, Jack & the Beanstalk, The Cow with the Musical Moo (not yet published at that time of course, but already leading a putative existence in my head), or, at most, Little Lord Fauntleroy or A Gentleman Every Inch of Him3 (yes, every inch, even that little pendent inch of penis) so you can imagine my amazement when the little bugger replied, The Wasteland by T.S. Eliot.4
"But", I said, "I don't recognize that book by its cover. I thought it was a little blue book, and yours is green."

"Oh," he said, "I'm reading it in the French translation." 

The sequel to that story is that the young Leavis fifteen years later went up to Lincoln College, Oxford, consorted with the rugby & rowing blue set, & failed miserably. Beware! Beware!

Can I imagine a Faulkner or a Hemingway in a university? Why not? Faulkner has been "writer in residence" at Ole Miss for several years.6

Thank you for your comments on my story. I agree with you that the story needs fleshing out. Actually I have had several ideas for improving it, and some evening soon when I am not too tired I shall tackle it. Thanks for offering to read it in its re-worked form.

Did you see from the latest (Dec 12) issue of Time that I came within an ace of making my debut as Latin orator before Mr Kruschev?7 The Beaver had him almost persuaded to come for a honorary degree & may get him this spring. I knew it was in the offing, but had to keep mum.

I see you have Brendan Behan in town.9 I hope you meet him, & will tell me all about it. I'm fascinated with the guy, & should love all the details you can give me.

You'll be amused to hear that Fred Cogswell (who's teaching our Can Lit course this year) assigned two students (one male, one female) the same essay topic, warning them, however, not to "get together" on their research. The subject? "Sex in the Poetry of Irving Layton."

Which reminds me that one of my former students sent me the complete London Times report on the Lady Chatterley trial.11 Fascinating! I have had the thing bound as a scrapbook for the use of my students.

Hope you had a good time at Dartmouth. I'm slowly plugging away at my lecture on Roberts.12 I hope to make it really epoch-making.

The above are thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.13 Please excuse my levity.

Love to Max & Aviva.

As ever,
Des Pacey

1Irving Layton, "Christmas Day," The Blue Propellor np. ("Holding it in/ Straining--groaning--sweating--/ But holding it in" lines 1-3).

2Ralph Leavis (b. 1935), Leavis' elder son.

3Frances Hodgson Burnett, Little Lord Fauntleroy (London: Frederick Warne, 1886).


Faulkner was writer-in-residence at the University of Virginia 1957-59; he attended the University of Mississippi for part of a year (1919-20) and worked as postmaster at the university post office 1921-24.

Time featured a brief article on Beaverbrook's plan to invite Kruschev to the University of New Brunswick:

As chancellor of the University of New Brunswick (to which he has donated millions), Beaverbrook wanted to issue an invitation to Mr. K. to visit Fredericton and there receive an honorary degree as doctor of laws. Kruschev reportedly was much interested, but could not make it: too many UN tables to pound.


Nickname for Lord Beaverbrook.

Brendan Behan (1923-64), Irish playwright and Republican activist, author of the plays The Quare Fellow (1954) and The Hostage (1958), and the memoir Borstal Boy (1958).


London Times Aug. 9 (4c & 10), 20 (4c), 26 (7b); Sept. 9 (3f),; Oct. 20 (3f), 321 (4b), 25 (5a), 28 (6a), 29 (10a); Nov. 1 (6c), 2 (8d), and 3 (5b & 13b).


Pacey is echoing the final line of T.S. Eliot's "Gerontion," Complete Poems and Plays 21-23.

December 11, 1960

Dear Desmond,

The week has gone by-and no letter from you. Don't let them work you too hard. I sent you a packet of letters, which I hope you received. This is the first of many more. You once asked me to send you letters, etc, etc. I find I've quite an accumulation, going back almost ten years. Is there anything you're particularly interested in-I've letters from Dudek, Souster, etc. A great many from Desmond Pacey! But these I'll hold on to and publish when I'm old and need the money.

In about an hour's time, I'm leaving for Toronto. Tomorrow I do a panel show for Project 61. It will probably be put on next Sunday. I haven't any idea what the subjects to be discussed will be: perhaps-"What Shall Be Done With The Nymphomaniacs In The Arctic Circle?"

Tonight there's a party at Jack McClelland's for Brian Moore. A literary party-ugh! Too many peacocks wanting you to stroke their feathers.

I had Leonard up for supper this Friday. Then I built a lively fire in the fireplace and we read his play "The Whipping"—a very macabre, compelling thing. This is the second one he's done since getting back from his Aegean
island, YDRA. The first one—"The Latest Step"—is also a macabre work, and also compelling. They would provide an evening's excellent theatre, and he's leaving for New York in a week or two to see if he can't get them put on in some off-Broadway theatre. His novel was returned from McClelland's with some rather cutting remarks, but after a brief period of depression he has bounced right back to his present buoyancy and achievement. He's a first-rate writer. His poems will be out in March or April. Do write soon.
All my love to Mary.

Affectionately, Irving


2Brian Moore (b. 1921), Ulster immigrant novelist who lived in Canada during the 1960s and in California since; author of The Luck of Ginger Coffey (1960) and Black Robe (1985).


5See 333.12.

6The Spice-Box of Earth; see 123.5.

338. December 19, 1960
Dear Irving,
I believe our last letters crossed— you had sent me a bundle of letters to you from fans etc, I wrote a facetious reply, and then about a day later I got your letter of December 11 explaining the bundle of letters.
I hope you weren't offended by my facetious and rather vulgar remarks about the letters. I was tired & therefore quite irresponsible when I wrote that letter. I am indeed happy to have any and all such letters to and from you for safekeeping in our Hathaway Collection. These will be of great interest to students of Canadian literary history. We should be delighted to get more of your letters. Letters to and from Dudek, Souster etc would be of especial interest & value.
Hope you had a good time in Toronto. I am struggling away trying to find the odd minute to work on my two 'away' lectures for next term—the Carleton one on Roberts & the Bishop's one on Can Lit in the '50s. I get so much routine work to do with this new job that the spare minutes are precious few.
I had a nice surprise today—a second cheque of $225 from CBC for a repeat broadcast of my stories "The Boat" & "The Lost Girl." I didn't even know they had been read the
first time. Anyway, I can certainly use the money—with my
eight dependents to feed & clothe.

Glad to hear Leonard Cohen's back. Any chance of my
reading the ms of his novel?

I'm going to try & write that story about the old man
dying as a television play.

I am sending you as a Christmas gift Robert Penn
Warren's novel The Cave. I hope you haven't read it. It's
quite an interesting book.

We'll be thinking of you on Christmas Day. Mary &
Philip (who got home from McGill yesterday) join me in
sending love. Incidentally, my second son, Peter (12), has
just started to take classical guitar lessons—another Max!

Love & kisses,
Des Pacey

1The Rufus H. Hathaway Collection of Canadian Literature was established by an ardent book
collector and friend of Carman and Roberts; upon his death in 1935 his library was transferred to
UNB.


3See 335.5


December 19, 1960

Dear Irving,

A postscript to my letter, which I just mailed—
Mary asked me to buy her the following art books.
Since I haven't been able to locate them in Fredericton,
would you see if you could get them for me in Montreal? Pay
for them & bill me, or have the bookseller bill me, as you
prefer.

Leonard Brooks: Water Color, A Challenge (Reinhold?)
Paul J. Sachs: Modern Prints & Drawings (Knopf)
Jakob Rosenberg: Great Draughtsmen from Pisanello to
Picasso
G.B. Bridgman: The Human Machine
Goldwater & Treves (eds.): Artists on Art from 14th C
to 20th C (Pantheon Books)
Fireside Book of Folk Songs, selected & edited by
Margaret Bradford Boni. Arranged by Nancy Lloyd. (Simon &
Schuster).

Of course I rather hope you don't locate them all at
once—it might beggar me!

Love,
Des P

Tis Wednesday, and Leonard Cohen & I have finished two acts of a play. By the end of this week it should be all wrapped up. We’re very pleased with it, and we’re busily and happily mapping out several more. We’ve set ourselves a goal of six plays before we end our collaboration for this year (1961). That ought to take us up to May, after which he and I might fly over to Europe. He’s got a lovely Norwegian girlfriend he wants to embrace again; my tastes, as you know, are international. If the CBC and some American stations take our plays (they had better!) we intend to make this a source of livelihood for both of us. It takes four hours in the afternoon from each of us, for five days in the week; leaves us all the time in the world to write poems, novels, stories. Another eight months then we’re completely free to spend the entire day as we wish. What’s also important is that we’re going to write the kind of TV play that intelligent and sensitive people have been wanting and not getting. This first play of ours is a damned hard-hitting drama about education with some lively dialogue and credible characters in it. I think you and Mary will be thrilled when you see it. Though when that will be is up to the gods in the CBC.

Tamarack Review has taken a short story of mine called "A Game of Chess" for their winter number. It will be flanked with some new poems. I think I wrote you that Milton Wilson gave me the same deal: in publishing a short story of mine, "Osmeck", along with some new poems, all in the one issue, the February one. Both mags will thereby advertise the fact that I write both poems and short stories. I have Jack McClelland’s assurance that The Swinging Flesh will be published this forthcoming April. He was greatly pleased by Birney’s reference to my "Vacation At La Voiselle" in the last number of Canadian Literature. I think it put more heart into him, you know how reluctant publishers are about publishing a book of short stories. In my case, it’s not only unmarketable stories, but
unmarketable poems as well. I tell him, in publishing, as well as in Algebra, it might turn out to be that two negatives make a plus.

Frank Scott is making a New Year's-Farewell-to-Montreal party this Saturday. Everyone is going to be there. I'm sorry to see Frank leave. Over the years I've developed a great affection for him; respect and admiration I always had. It's not that I see much of him, but he's always been a point of reference in the city. He's leaving for Japan, so I've been told. Plans to study the constitution of the Geisha girls, I suppose!

Of the list of books you commissioned me to get, I managed to locate four. The booksellers promised to get them off to you with/out any delay. Have you received them?

Aviva is very happy these days. The snow lies thick on the branches of the tree which fronts our window, and when we have a roasting fire going in our fireplace, she curls up cosy-as-you-please in the armchair. She has finished revising and typing three of her children's stories. By the end of this week she hopes to have enough of them done to send a book along to McClelland & Stewart. They've expressed a great interest in them several times, but this is the first time Aviva has sat down to do something about them. Maxie is reading Koestler's Darkness at Noon. We're a busy household, we are. Love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving


2Marianne Jensen.


4See 335.7 & .8.


6In 1960 Scott was awarded a Canada Council Senior Research Fellowship to continue his studies of comparative constitutional law. He decided to circumnavigate the globe travelling to major centres of constitutional law, leaving in early January, 1961.


December 29, 1960

Dear Irving,

This will have to a very short note, as I am frantically busy trying to get the first draft of my Carleton lecture on Roberts written. That lecture comes off on February 4, and I know that once classes start here again on January 10 I shall have virtually no time to work on it. I have managed to dig up quite a lot of interesting new background information for the lecture, and I am quite thrilled to find that my talk will coincide almost to the day with the seventeenth anniversary of Lampman’s famous Ottawa lecture on Roberts (the source of that lovely quote about reading Orion & being so thrilled to find that such work could be done by a young man "one of ourselves" etc).\(^1\) I have some really fascinating stuff, if I can just mould it into an interesting design.

Well, I was awfully relieved to get your letter. Not having heard from you for so long, I was scared that you had been really hurt by that rather silly, sarcastic letter I wrote you one day when I was over-tired.

It is so good of you to have tracked down those books for Mary, and though they haven’t arrived yet I am sure they will be along any day now.

By the way, you don’t mention getting the book I sent you for Christmas. Did it by any chance get lost in the heavy Xmas mails?

Glad to hear of your plays for the CBC, short stories for Tamarack & the Forum etc. I think I told you that the CBC sent me an unexpected cheque for a repeat performance of my stories "The Boat", & "The Lost Girl". Emboldened by this success, I have now sent them two other stories.\(^2\)

Our enjoyment of Christmas has been considerably dampened by an attack of stomach ‘flu, an epidemic of which is currently sweeping the city. It hit one of the children on Christmas Eve, then the rest of us gradually succumbed. Food still doesn’t interest me, & the very thought of alcohol is abhorrent. Since Mary & I are invited to no less than five New Year’s Eve parties, I’m hoping to have recovered my appetite for Scotch by that time.

We had hoped to have a lot of our usual family holiday fun skiing, tobogganing & skating, but so far have not felt up to it. Perhaps we shall get started tomorrow.

We are tentatively thinking of taking a trip down through the States next summer. I’ve never been south of NYC, & should like to see Washington & parts of the deep South—especially of course the Faulkner country.

Glad to hear that Aviva has been working on her children’s stories. I wish her every success with them. And give my best to Maxie.

I must get back to work now, but be assured, Irving, of my lasting affection & admiration for you, & if I am ever cheap, smart, or sarcastic, attribute it to tiredness, not to malice.

Your devoted, Des Pacey
December 30, 1960

Dear Desmond,

Your remarks were delightfully innocent. Go ahead and paper your bathroom with those letters I sent you, or wipe your arse with them. Do anything you like, but don’t start treating me like a stuffed shirted member of the Establishment. You can pull my ears, or stick your tongue out at me as often as you wish. Offended? Man, have you lost your wits!

Are you coming to Toronto for the Canadian Festival of the Arts? It’s shaping up to be something big—hugely impressive, etc, etc—welcoming address by Mayor Phillips, luncheons, and other evidences of Canada’s cultural maturity. Anyhow, there’ll be readings by Macpherson, Birney, and Leonard Cohen. Also a chance, Layton might be squeezed into the program. Culture is booming in this country along with the oil stocks. Hooray!

This aft Leonard and I will have finished our first TV play, "Lights On The Black Water," a play about education. I’ll tell you before you ask me: it’s damned good! Next week we begin another, called "One For The Books." It’s about a Communist bookseller. Starting next week, we’re also going to hold regular playreading sessions at my home; Leonard & I know several actors and actresses at the new Theatre School that’s been opened up here in Montreal. Some of the latter are enough to give anyone an abiding interest in Strindberg, Ibsen, etc. You ought to see their lovely forms and faces. Life is wonderful.

Tomorrow is the last day of the old year. It’s been an exciting, productive year for me; I hope the coming one will be equally so. But the grandest, most wonderful thing has been yours and Mary’s friendship. God bless you both. Aviva & Max join me in wishing you and your family every joy for 1961. Will think of you tomorrow at midnight and toast you merrily with it.

Love,
Irving

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1The Canadian Conference of the Arts, sponsored by an association of forty cultural organizations (the name of the association was also "The Canadian Conference of the Arts"), was held May 4-6, 1961, at the O’Keefe Centre in Toronto; Alan Jarvis was the director of the conference; it was opened by A.W. Trueman, Executive Director of the Canada Council, and the keynote address was delivered by Claude Bissell. Northrop Frye’s opening-day speech on "The Contemporary Artist" declared "The contemporary artist must rely upon the contemporary scholar...[Contemporary art] is academic and scholarly, newly possessed of tremendous technical resources and still experimenting with their use."
January 10, 1961

Dear Desmond,

I've finished a second play, this one an Existentialist thing called "A Man Was Killed." It makes for an exciting half-hour drama, maybe longer, and if so can be possibly stretched to an hour. Did I tell you the title of the first one? It's called "Lights On The Black Waters", and is a drama about education. I've alerted Bob Weaver, since he's currently in command of Festival 61. I hope he takes it. The other one might slot very nicely into Ross McLean's new Q for Quest.

This Friday, Leonard and I begin on our third play. We've each got a couple of ideas and characters we'd like to let loose on the screen. After we've done a half-dozen TV plays, we intend to write a stageplay--in YDRA, Greece, or Sunny Spain. Both of us are having a great time knocking out these plays. How is your own coming on?

Frank Scott was here Sunday night. He came with Marian, and Leonard and a friend, sculptor Rosengarten, dropped in later. I had a lively fire going in the fireplace and the conversation was high and hilarious. Frank was in good form, repeating several of his best anecdotes about his father, but with such verve and gusto, I quite disremembered I had heard them several times before. Between stories and anecdotes, F.R.S has taken to snatching short naps from which he awakens marvellously refreshed and invigorated ready to launch into his next batch of stories. Since his naps eliminate the need for listening to anyone else's stories, it gives him a considerable advantage over the rest of us.

I've just finished reading Roy Campbell's excellent little book on Lorca. The fellow writes like a true poet, whatever his political opinions may have been. I'm bound also to say there's more of the true fire of poetry in him than in the more respectable figures of the Left, ie, Spender. I can even begin to understand why he punched the latter squarely on the nose. There's a puritanism in the Left, which more and more I'm beginning to find distasteful, though my literary disenchantment with them began several years back. They're anti-Dionysian, Hebraic. Look out for my poem, "Dance With A Watermelon," which is scheduled to appear in next month's issue of The Canadian Forum. It posits the basic antagonism between the Dionysian and the
Hebraic about as well as any poem of mine ever did, and comes down squarely on the side of Dionysius.

I receive all sorts of "little mags." I suppose you do too. If ever you come across a single good poem in them will you kindly draw my attention to it. Poetry seems to be in an awful state of doldrums, all sails becalmed. The giants are going or gone, and the epigones can only munch on the crumbs swept from their tables. Hysteria, neurosis, misery. It's all so sick-making, or would be if I were disposed to let Beckett and the Evergreen claque\(^9\) pour their venomed spittle into my ears. To hell with modern invalidism. Gutlessness. Of course, the artist is an eternal nay-sayer, but his Adversary is God himself who speaks the language of thunderbolts. Wanted: another Hercules to clean up the stables of modern literature.\(^{10}\)

I received your Xmas book The Cave a few days ago. Many, many thanks. I hope Warren's prose is better than his poetry.

My warmest love to Mary.

Yours,

Irving

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\(^1\)Festival 61 was a 1961 CBC television program featuring original hour-long Canadian dramas, produced by Robert Weaver.

\(^2\)Ross McLean (1925-87), CBC Television drama producer; producer of This Hour Has Seven Days and Close-Up.

\(^3\)O for Quest was a CBC television program founded in 1960.

\(^4\)Morton Rosengarten (b. 1933), Montreal sculptor, Cohen's close friend since childhood (the two ran a small gallery, "The Four Penny" in 1958); his solo show at the National Arts Centre in 1981 featured portrait drawings of Canadian poets for the limited edition The Lines of the Poet.


\(^6\)Campbell punched Spender as the latter was about to begin a reading for the Poetry Society in the Ethical Church in Bayswater on 14 April 1949; the incident is recounted in Peter Alexander's Roy Campbell: A Critical Biography (London: Oxford UP, 1982) 213-15.

\(^7\)In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche delineates two strands in civilization—the Dionysian and the Apollonian; Matthew Arnold, in Culture and Anarchy makes a similar observation in chapter Five, entitled "Hebraism and Hellenism."

\(^8\)See 335.8.

\(^9\)Samuel Beckett (1906-89), playwright, novelist, poet and critic, one of the creators of the "Theatre of the Absurd;" the Evergreen Review (1957-73) was an avant-garde American literary periodical edited by Barney Rossett famed for its radical and uncensored writing—frequent contributors included Beckett, Burroughs, Cummings and Kerouac.

\(^{10}\)In Greek mythology, cleansing the stables of King Augeas was the fifth of the twelve tasks which won Hercules immortality.
January 11, 1961

Dear Irving,

Sorry to have been so long answering your pleasant letter of December 30. I have been up to my ears writing my Roberts lecture, and an article on our resident artist, Bruno Bobak, for Canadian Art. Both are now completed, and I can breathe a little more easily. However, there are a great many other things I should be writing—I have fallen away behind on my schedule.

I have heard nothing at all about the Canadian Festival of the Arts. Presumably it is being run by a bunch of bastards who think Canada is comprised of the Ottawa-Toronto-Montreal triangle. Anyway I have no particular desire to be involved in that kind of public relations stunt. Brendan Behan’s comments on the O’Keefe Centre sound exactly right to me.

Our Christmas holiday was somewhat impaired by illness. An epidemic of stomach ‘flu was raging in Fredericton, and it started in our family on Christmas Eve and ran right through to last Friday. I had it badly on Boxing Day, & it hit Mary on New Year’s Eve (at our third party of the night) & we had to stop our celebrating early. She was in bed all of New Year’s Day, and I had to cook the dinner etc.

I hope your playwriting continues to thrive. It all sounds most exciting.

The books you were kind enough to order— for Mary arrived a week or so ago. Thank you very much indeed for all your trouble.

I am still wondering whether the novel I sent you as an Xmas present ever arrived.

Mary & I expect to be going through Montreal on our way to the lecture in Ottawa on the morning of February 3, and again on our return journey on February 5. I haven’t checked yet to see what intervals there are between trains in Montreal, but as soon as I know I shall let you know.

I’ve just checked with the CPR, & find that we would arrive in Montreal at 9:20am Friday (Feb 3) & leave at 9:50—so that’s not worth your bothering about. Unfortunately the same is true on the way back—just half an hour between trains.

Now your letter of Jan 10 has just arrived—more plays—good!

And the Warren novel arrived—good!

And you think most of the poetry in the little mags stinks—I couldn’t agree with you more.

Did you see O For Guest last night? A really hard-hitting debate on painting between Harold Town, Willie Ronald & Jack Nichols?

And is Frank Scott leaving Montreal forever—or just for a year or so?

Did you hear any of David Galloway’s University of the Air lectures on Shakespeare? Very good, I thought.
Are you going to be on Fighting Words again? If you are, how about putting in a good word for me with Cohen? I’d rather like to air my views on that programme sometime.

Keep writing—you’re the only one in Canada today worth a damn. Love to Max & Aviva.

Des Pacey


345. January 24, 1961

Dear Desmond,

Like yourself a while ago, I’ve been busy all week correcting exam papers. Were I to judge from them alone, I’d say the intellect of the race was petering out. In a class of nearly fifty, there was only one first-rate paper, and what does that mean?—Nothing. The woman doesn’t really care for poetry, or cares for it for the wrong reasons. As an opiate or an aphrodisiac. The rest of the students are pathetic parrots who make the necessary sounds and gurgles. My one feeling is that I’ve helped them make them, increased their range and variety.

At Bishop’s I learned that you’re going to be a panelist along with Gustafson some time in March.1 The two of you are going to look down into the long, bacteria-laden throat of Canadian culture, and pronounce whether the tonsils are healthy or not. Dr Pacey! The head of the department, Prof Grey,2 has written to ask me to attend, and seeing you and Ralph are going to be there I’ll bring Aviva and Leonard Cohen up with me, and all of us might make a lively party—something the Anglican priests3 will tell their illegitimate children about when they’re old and retired.

No, Frank isn’t leaving us forever. He’ll be gone for four or five months, and we’ve made tentative plans for Frank, Marian, Leonard and I to meet at YDRA. Leonard owns a whole goddamned house there. Excepting myself, they’re all very confident they can make it. My own plans for the summer are not certain. I like the frogs and frogponds of the Laurentians. Summer is when I write poetry. Last summer I was touring the southern states, and the year before that I was in France and Italy. Some good poems came of both adventures, but I’ve a strong feeling that like Antaeus I’d better make contact with familiar earth again.4 We’ll see.

I’m sorry to learn that you and Mary had such a poor time of it during the Xmas festivities. You must have carried hospitality too far—entertaining flu viruses is really carrying generosity too far, much in excess of what
the season demanded of you. I hope my Dufy book\(^5\) cheered her up and Hugh Kenner’s *Gnomon*\(^6\) did the same for you. He writes sensibly about books and authors, but he has an execrably thick ear for prose. Of these barbarous American critics, dropping their ugly professorial beads of sweat on Blake’s sunflower.\(^7\) Will no one remind these muttonheads that analysis is not ecstasy and that in the presence of Love and Mystery, the only proper thing to do is to remove one’s shoes, and one’s pretensions along with them? Those idiots would rather read a marriage manual than make love!

Look here, I’m going to meet you at the station on Friday morning. We’ll have time enough for a cup of coffee, and for me to refresh Mary’s memory of a certain famous kiss I gave her when she was last here. Give her my love. I’m looking forward to seeing both of you.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving


1Desmond Pacey and Ralph Gustafson, panel discussion on Canadian Culture, Bishop’s Festival of the Arts, Bishop’s University, Lennoxville, Quebec, 18 Mar. 1961.

2Professor Grey, Head of the English department at Bishop’s University.

3Bishop’s University in Lennoxville, Quebec, was founded in 1843 under the sponsorship of George Mountain, third Anglican bishop of Quebec, to provide a liberal education for English-speaking Lower Canada and to train Anglican clergy.

4A gigantic wrestler in Greek mythology whose strength was invincible so long as he touched the earth.


346. January 25, 1961

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of January 24. I must answer it quickly, as I have a committee meeting in about 15 mins. I write so quickly in reply, because I am afraid you may think it is this Friday that we are coming through. I believe you were confused once before—so I’ll make clear that it is Friday February 3 that we shall be there.

Now I hate to think of you going all the way down to the station for what at most will be a thirty minute stopover, and which at worst (with the possible blizzards etc) may be no stopover at all. I’d love to see you, but at
least check with the railway & make sure our train is on time. I know occasionally, when it is late, they make Ottawa passengers get off at Montreal West, to make the transfer.

It is good to know that you will be at Bishop's too. If the Ottawa trip goes off all right--that is, if our eldest daughter proves equal to the task of looking after the little ones for a weekend--I may be able to persuade Mary to go with me to Bishop's, & then with you & Aviva there we can have a real get-together.

Thank you very much indeed for the two books. Mary has been eagerly reading the Dufy book, & I've been reading Kenner with interest if with some reservations. As you say, he has an abominable prose style, but some of his judgments are discerning.

Did I tell you my Roberts' lecture is written & ready for delivery? Not epoch-making, but moderate & sensible I think. I'm now trying to sort out my ideas for the Bishop's talk--I'm to speak for 45 mins or so before the panel discussion with Gustafson et al, I believe. As a matter of fact, I've been quite creative (for me) lately--I did a 3000 word article on Bruno Bobak which Canadian Art has accepted for its March issue, sold another short story to the CBC1 (a revision of "The Conversion of Mrs McComb"--about the evangelical campaign & the bootleggers in Ontario), & am gradually getting my TV play into shape.

I must get to my meeting--hugs & kisses all round. If you do meet us next week, by all means give Mary a really stimulating kiss--it's good for her glands (& for mine!).

Keep your flag flying,
love,
Des Pacey


February 15, 1961
Dear Desmond,

How did your talk at Carleton go? Successfully, I hope. It was good to see you and Mary, even for the all-too-brief half-hour. Both of you looked well and happy, and that gave me much pleasure.

I hope you like the enclosed poem "Belvedere." I'm sending it to you to persuade you (if you need any persuasion) that I still have my hand in--and intend to for a long, long time to come. Leonard Cohen and I are now well into our third play.2 We're learning a great deal about drama in the process of writing it. By the way, here's a story that will interest you. Cohen had his novel sent back to him by McClelland & Stewart with a reader's report (there were three readers) that was less a critical analysis than a psychoanalyst's report. It was downright abusive and insulting. On my advice, he sent it to an American
publisher whom I knew. Well, two days ago he received an extremely warm and sensitive appreciation from the Assistant Editor, himself a novelist, who told Leonard that five readers had seen the novel and that everyone of them agreed that it was the most promising first novel they had ever seen. Of course it's going to be published. But what I asked Weaver (he was one of the Can readers) was this—and I still ask it: "Where would Canadian talent be without the more perceptive and cosmopolitan intelligence of the Americans to recognize and hail it?" Another friend of mine has also had a novel returned from a Cndn publisher—"the ending is too bleak." Again, on my advice, he is sending it to the same Am publisher LC sent his novel to. The whole thing is disheartening for those of us who still cling to the hope that Canada can ever be anything but mediocre and second-rate.

"Belvedere" is the sort of poem my "preface" in Red Carpet looks forward to. If I could write another ten or fifteen like it, before I pass on to my reward, my name "will not have been writ on water." This is a poem about the tragic vision, but it has the smell of mortality in it—which Yeats' "Lapis Lazuli" has not, the absence of that desirable odour making the poem for all its many virtues, a stylized piece of highly self-conscious play-acting. "He laughs at jests," etc...etc. Love to Mary.

Yours,

Irving

enclosure: ts. "Belvedere"

1Irving Layton, "Belvedere," published as "My Eyes Are Wide Open," The Swinging Flesh 154.


3Millicent Marmur of Simon & Shuster; see 320.1.

4Keats' epitaph; see 17.3.


6"He jests at scars, that never felt a wound." 2.1.43, William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet.


348. February 17, 1961

Dear Irving,

Thank you very much for your letter of February 15. After you were gracious enough to come down to the station to meet us, I should have been gracious enough to write to you first: but as it happens I do have a good excuse as we have had a real academic crisis here in which I have been involved and which has kept me hopping. I can’t tell you
all of the intricacies of the situation but it involved the banning of a play which the university drama society was going to produce.\(^1\) On the face of it it looked like high-handed censorship from and by the president, and I & various other members of the faculty were all set to howl about academic freedom etc. Then I learned the facts, and saw that in the very unusual circumstances the president had reluctantly done the only thing he could do. So then I had the tricky task of cooling down some of the hotheads without being able to give them the real information, and it called for some pretty tricky diplomacy. There was a general faculty meeting and a special faculty meeting and all kinds of informal meetings, and for a while the campus was virtually in chaos, but fortunately the agitation is dying down now.

Well, you ask about the Carleton speech. The speech went very well indeed. I wasn’t nearly as nervous beforehand as I had expected to be, and indeed was sufficiently relaxed to be able to sleep for an hour just before it was time to leave for the lecture theatre. The theatre was full, and I had the audience in the palm of my hand. By the time I came to Lampman’s tribute to Roberts at the end I was really loosened up, & I made that passage come to life as I had never ever had it come to life for myself before. I thought the applause would never stop—they must have clapped for a solid five minutes. It was quite moving. And there were some pretty bright people there—F.H. Underhill, Eugene Forsey, Kaye Lamb,\(^2\) Dean Gibson,\(^3\) George Johnstone etc etc. Several of Roberts’ sons and daughters\(^4\) were there too.

After the speech I was guest of honour at a party given by Wilf Eggleston.\(^5\) The Scotch was so good & so plentiful, & I so exhilarated that I am afraid I & Mary both imbibed more generously than we should, & we both had hangovers on the Sunday morning!

The sad part of the weekend, however, concerned Mary’s paintings. I think I told you that big flat package contained two of her paintings. Our plan was to have them framed at the Robertson galleries & have the gallery deliver the framed paintings to the National Gallery as entries for the Canadian Biennial Exhibition. They were her two best paintings. Well, we took them to Robertson at 4 pm Friday—and at 11 am Saturday his gallery caught fire & Mary’s paintings were destroyed!\(^6\) Of course she will ultimately get insurance on them, but that will not replace the paintings. So that put a bit of a damper on our enthusiasm.

Now there is so much I could tell you that I am apt to go on forever. Before I forget I must tell you that I like your new poem very much indeed—I think it is undoubtedly one of your best. I was also very pleased to get the good news of Leonard Cohen’s novel--& I share all your indignation about the Canadian reaction.

I have completed and sent off one television play—a half-hour comedy—to the CBC, & am now working on another.\(^7\)
I have also sent a short story to Tamarack Review, two stories to the BBC in London, three children's stories to Cape for their anthology, & am working on a Centennial tribute to Bliss Carman (b. April 15, 1861) -- so you see, I'm really rolling at the moment & just hope I can keep going for a while.

Love & kisses,
Des Pacey

1 On 9 February 1961, the President of the University of New Brunswick Drama Society, Walter Learning, announced the resignation of the drama group's executive due to the cancellation of "Midnight Alley" by Leslie Charles following the university administration's "strong suggestion" that the play not be performed.


3 James Alexander Gibson (b. 1912), Professor of History at Carleton University (1947-63), Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science, Carleton University (1951-63), President of Brock University (1963-74), author of A Governor-General Looks at Canada (1978).

4 C.G.D. Roberts and his wife had four children: Athelstan (1882-95); Lloyd (1884-1968), Edith (1886-1963), and Douglas (1888-1961).

5 Wilfrid Eggleston (1901-86), journalist, broadcaster, novelist and poet; founding director of the School of Journalism at Carleton (1947), author of The Frontier and Canadian Letters (1957).

6 A general alarm fire destroyed Ottawa's Dominion United Church and the city's foremost private art gallery, Robertson's Art Galleries on Queen street (owned by John Robertson since March 1953) on February 4, 1961.

7 Pacey submitted a television play entitled "Two to Tango" on 15 February, 1961; it was rejected by Edythe French, Script Editor, in a letter of 16 March 1961.

8 See 353.

9 See 353.3.


349.[ts]

February 22, 1961

Mr Irving Layton
5731 Somerled Avenue
Montreal, PQ
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your very amusing poem about Mrs. Kennedy. I am delighted that you are again writing verse.

I am sending you the typescript of my Roberts lecture. I shall be glad to get your comments.
You may keep the script if you wish, but if you have no use for it perhaps you would return it.
We are looking forward to Roy Daniells' visit next week.

Yours sincerely,
Desmond Pacey

DP/hm

1 Roy Daniells, "Founder's Day Address," The University of New Brunswick, 2 March 1961.

February 27, 1961
Dear Desmond,

Yesterday, the city was hit by a freak snowstorm that unloosed beauty and damage everywhere. People shivered in their unheated homes, but when they looked out they saw ice-covered trees and wires glittering radiant-crystalled in the sun. The trees outside our apartment were encased in ice and I was torn between admiration for the singular beauty and fear that the trees would not be able to survive it.

Our divided world. This morning, while I'm writing this letter to you, a strong sun is melting the ice off the branches and twigs, and all that remains of yesterday's grandeur are some ugly broken crusts that make the limbs of the trees look like a gathering of lizards or bleached crocodiles.

Luckily, we have a fire-place and we kept a good blaze going in it all day. We imagined ourselves [as] our primitive ancestors sitting in front of a cave fire, enveloped by darkness and tiger howls. We ate our evening meal by candle-light. It was all very cosy. It needs something like this every now and then to remind us how dependent we are on modern conveniences--necessities, rather--such as electricity, furnace, central heating, etc. And yet, I dunno. There was something the strange day had which this commonplace and secure day is without. Maybe the imagination needs the darkness and is fertilized by terror.

Under the light of the sun, everything becomes objective and prosaic. Edison¹ probably did more than any other man to kill the art instinct in humans. If we want great poets and story-tellers, let's smash all the electric cables and neonlights, and return to candles and the moon.

I spent the whole day reading an excellent book. It's called Soviet Leaders & Mastery Over Man.² The author is Hadley Cantril. It dotted the i's and crossed the t's of many of my own recent reflections concerning the new Soviet Man; runs, in fact, parallel to my "foreword" to The Swinging Flesh. Cantril is a great social psychologist and social scientist: it's frightening to see him confirm the intuitions of a poet. Read the book before you're many days older, and get your students to read it. Maybe if enough people in the hemisphere are roused from their somnolence and complacency, we might still save the day for free human nature. At least with Kennedy in the White House, I feel we
have a fighting chance. The Americans, and we along with them, have had a very narrow escape. Another four years of donothing Republicanism and it would have been all over. I think Kennedy understands what we're up against and he's tough and resourceful. I always favoured him against Stevenson. I think he'll go down in history as one of the truly great American presidents. Just to make certain he will, I'm sending him a copy of Cantril's book with a letter advising him exactly how he should go about fighting Communist totalitarianism. Who knows, it may be the most decisive letter in history? But seriously, I think Kennedy needs all the good advice he can get, and I have lots of it to give to him. I have an idea that he ought to make effective use of the many great writers in his country to do ideological battle with the Russians—for there is their Achilles' heel. The Russians are sensitive about "Culture": what they cannot endure is to have mockery and ridicule poured over their twisted ideas—and I'd like to see novelists, poets, and playwrights doing just that until the whole smelly nonsense is laughed out of court. It's about time the West took the offensive—politically, economically and ideologically. At the time of the Suez affair, I thought our hour had struck and that at last we were going to match the determination and ruthlessness of the Russians. I was mistaken. We had Eisenhower then. But now we have a leader who's prepared to act resolutely. I shall do all I can to make people aware of what his task is, and what our own actions & attitudes ought to be if we are to win the day. I fired my first opening shot last week at the Sir GW Philosophical Society:3 I promise you it won't be my last. What damned fool said there were no causes left to fight for?

I'm delighted to hear from you that your address at Carleton was so very well-received. Reading it, I can see why. It's a masterful essay, informative without being pedantic: and a fair assessment of Roberts' work to boot. Thank you for sending me a copy. Of course I wish to keep it, and with your permission I shall. My Jacqueline poem will appear in next month's Canadian Forum.4 I'll send a copy of it, along with Cantril's book to President Kennedy. Maybe he'll invite me to spend a week-end at the White House! I've sent Jackie a copy of Red Carpet, and my "Osmeeck" story in the CF. But so far, the silence is deafening. I also recently sent her a lovely note5 in which I compared her face to the Rosa Mystica,6 and said the world got whatever fragrance it had from it. Still, no acknowledgement. Ah well, the course of love, etc, etc.

Affectionately,
Irving

1Thomas Edison (1847-1931), American inventor whose greatest contribution was the electric light (1879).

March 6, 1961
Dear Irving,

Saw you last night on Fighting Words¹—and thought you had much the best of it. Of course there’s all the difference in the world between a comedian & a writer like Henry James—and of course the blaze of publicity which suits the former ruins the latter.

Thanks for your letter of February 27. I am glad you survived—and even enjoyed—the ice-storm. And I’m glad too that you enjoyed my Roberts piece.

I’m up to my ears now—re-reading the books of the ’50s for the Bishop’s talk. I haven’t even started to write the speech yet, & fear that it isn’t going to be much good. I’m too harassed by all my other duties, & too pressed for time on the speech, to come up with the calm, speculative talk I should like to produce.

Are you still planning to go to Bishop’s? I’ve decided to go just for the one day, Saturday, arriving at 6:35am & leaving that night at 9:55.

Your second last poem was a terrific thing²—but the Jackie poem though amusing was too diffuse & even rather silly. I’m surprised at your publishing that. You should be more judicious—of course people will print anything you write now that you’re the fad, but should you let them? And do I detect a trace of megalomania in your correspondence with Jack & Jackie—or were you simply pulling my leg?

Yours as ever,
Des Pacey

¹Fighting Words CBC Television, 5 Mar. 1961. (Panelists Irving Layton, comedian Shelley Berman, editor of Saturday Night Arnold Edinborough, and radio and television dramatist Rita Greer Allen; moderator Nathan Cohen. The first quotation, Norman Mailer’s remark, "America is a cruel soil for talent; it stunts it, blights, uproots it or overheats it" led to a discussion of the difference between creative artists and performing artists, more specifically, between writers and comedians. At this point Layton remarks: "The writer is a different personality...it has an ego but he’s an ego with a different commodity than that of the comedian who stands up and must get the public immediately—you can’t compare that with a writer like Henry James!")

²"Belvedere," see 347.1.
March 21, 1961

Dear Desmond,

Something turned up [at] the last moment, and I couldn’t make the Bishop scene. In any case, I should have been too overwhelmed by the encomiums you heaped on me. I was at a party last night given for Bob Weaver—your words were quoted to me all evening, so that I felt I was under a shower of bay and green laurel which kept raining down on me from all sides. Each one approached me breathlessly as if he wanted to be the first one to announce the good news—I wondered at times whether I had won a difficult marathon or a weight-lifting contest.

Cohen and I were at the party to buttonhole Bob Weaver. We want him to read for himself, under our very eyes, the play we have just finished and which we think is the funniest comedy or farce since Sheridan. He agreed to meet us this afternoon. This might be it, the breakthrough. We have two other plays, presently being considered both in Toronto and London, but it would be nice if somebody, after all these months of concentrated hard work, sent us an acceptance and a cheque. Leonard and I are planning to write a stageplay—several of them—next fall. Our collaboration is an amazing thing: we complement each other wonderfully, the one supplying what the other lacks. Though, perhaps, that’s not it: it’s just a lot more fun working together, and he and I have had some convivial afternoons since we began this project.

The poem you called "silly" is about to explode in the world’s headlines. Someone in Pittsburgh read it in the Canadian Forum and in great excitement phoned me long distance. The poem had so overwhelmed her that she showed it to Governor Lawrence of the State of Pennsylvania, who wants me to compose a personal letter inviting Jacqueline Kennedy to come to the Canadian Arts Festival at which I shall read the poem! My letter to JK is being sent to her, along with the poem, with a covering letter by the Governor. Because I’m a magnanimous soul, I’ll resist the temptation to tweak your nose; only content myself with the observation that Canadians are a singularly unaudacious lot. But you’re not even a Canadian?

You missed the point entirely of that poem. I wasn’t being flippant, etc: I was paying a very serious tribute, not to Jacqueline, but to President Kennedy, on whom all our hopes for freedom and peace rest today. There’s the stamp of greatness on that man; at last our side has produced a champion who can take the measure of the Kruschevs and wipe the democratic floor with them. Everything he has said & done since his inauguration convinces me we’ve started the slow uphill climb to victory. The Left, grown muscle-bound with outworn shibboleths over the years, will have to revise a good many of its theories and attitudes, especially it’s thinking about the United States.

Poets have ways of knowing not given to others. What I feel today, millions will be thinking and believing
tomorrow. I am enclosing an excerpt from last week's Jewish Review. You'll notice the similarity in outlook between the remarks made at the Conference and the one I expressed in my verses, written nearly one year ago. Of course I shan't be thanked for saying these things--verse has a nakedness denied to journalism or oratory--and my motives will be misunderstood and misrepresented, but that's how the Matzo Ball crumbles. I expect, when my book appears, there will be a huge outcry from a certain section of my co-brethren. The huger this outcry, the more certain I shall be my blows have landed where I intended them to. Even your praises are not going to turn me respectable and soft.

Because I love you and cheerfully forgive you your blindnesses, I'm enclosing another poem which I finished last week. I hope this time you won't be "silly" and call it "silly". Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

PS Please keep the JK story to yourself. Important!!!


2"Why I Don't Make Love to the First Lady;" see 350.5.

3Although a Canadian citizen, Pacey was born in Dunedin, New Zealand.

inefficient--they’ve had it two months!). I am sending my Bishop’s speech to Canadian Literature.5

My problem now is that two of my books are out of print & must be revised for a new edition--Creative Writing in Canada and A Book of Canadian Stories. I don’t know about you, but I hate revising things--I much sooner write two whole new books. But I feel I must do these revisions before I can start on anything new.

Well, I like your new poem very much indeed. And I wasn’t against the Jackie poem--I was just trying to provoke you into one of your angry tirades, which I enjoy so much. But the best poem lately is the one about growing old etc which you sent me either with or just before the Jackie poem. That really had substance & vision.

I wish I had your sublime confidence in JFK. He’s certainly better than Ike, but against that background any star would shine. You certainly go overboard for people & causes, don’t you?

The serious element in my criticism of the Jackie poem was my feeling that it, & particularly what you told me in that letter about writing to Kennedy etc, made me fear that you were indulging in a sort of megalomania. What has the poet to do with presidents and politicians? Directly, I’d say, nothing--indirectly, of course, everything.

Fundamentally, I believe, you are a humble & modest man--but I have to keep reminding myself of that, for so often in your letters & in your public pronouncements you pretend to be an insufferable braggart. Why do you so often assume that ass’s mask?

Well, I also seem to end up preaching at you--than which nothing could be more absurd! Give my love to your little one--and to Max. Hope to see you all in June.’

Love,
Des Pacey

closure: Edythe French, CBC Script Editor, letter to Desmond Pacey, 16 Mar. 1961, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada. from CBC (fugitive)


2The BBC did not broadcast Pacey’s play.


5Pacey’s speech was broadcast on Anthology (see 354.1) but did not appear in Canadian Literature.

6The annual meeting of the Royal Society was held on the campus of McGill University 5-7 June 1961.
March 29, [1961]

Dear Irving,

Two exciting letters awaited me on my return from speaking at Mt A--

1) CBC is to use my Bishop’s talk on Anthology on April 14.¹

2) L’Association des Editeurs Canadiennes invite me to be one of 25 jurors to pick the ten best novels, ten best non-fiction & five best books of poems written by Canadians since World War II. For this purpose I am to attend a grand banquet at St Helen’s Island (Champlain Cafe) on April 18 at 7 pm. They pay all expenses--so I have accepted & shall be arriving in Mtl on the morning of April 18 & staying till the evening of April 19.

Would you like me to stay with you, or shall I get a hotel room? In any case, we must spend a lot of time together.

Things are going well!

Love,

Des P

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March 31, 1961

Dear Desmond,

When Weaver was in town last week, Leonard and I sat him down and read the new play through from beginning to end. He said he liked it very much; took it with him, in fact, back to Toronto. The play’s title is "Up With Nothing." It does look as if Festival 61 might use it. The CBC still has our other play, "Lights On The Black Water"--it’s now almost three months.¹ It oughtn’t to take this long: do bureaucracies have to behave like this? I wonder. Yes, you might have a better chance with the BBC. If you’re going to send plays and stories to England, you ought to find yourself a good agent. Perhaps, you have got one, though. Agents know the markets and might find the right spot for something once written, when the author can’t. Well, I am glad you’re having such a good run with your stories. The BBC has taken two of them--wonderful! Congratulations. And the Atlantic Advocate and Tamarack Review! Whew.

Me, I’m biting my fingernails, waiting for The Swinging Flesh to appear. There’s a good chance I’ll see a copy in a couple of weeks. I corrected the page proofs several days ago. McClelland & Stewart--anyway, Claire Pratt,² who’s the associate editor--have been very patient with me. While the book was in production, I kept on sending one new poem after another to be added to the book, and they never balked once. All the four poems I wrote in the past month or so are going to be included: "My Eyes Are Wide Open"; "With the Money I Spend"; "Why I Don’t Make Love to the First Lady", and now
this one, the latest, which I'm enclosing: "The Fictive Eye". There are now forty-three poems in TSF.

J.F.K--he's the greatest! And we're damned lucky to have him. When I hear from people like yourself and from other "intellectuals" who share your lack of enthusiasm, I realize once more what a narrow escape we've had. Think of Nixon and how he wd have handled the Congo and Laotian business. Doesn't it make your hair stand up? What's the matter with the "leftist" intellectuals anyhow? They're sterile, and part of this sterility shows itself in their inability to respond to greatness. They sicken me! There's no enthusiasm in their souls, no fervor. Of course, your own case is understandable: living in a quiet place like Fredericton, it's easy for you to mistake complacency and emotional sloth for Olympianism. It happens all the time in this country; indeed, it's the Canadian disease par excellence. This country, I've finally come to realize, is hopeless. Since our most vigorous spirits leave for more hospitable places, the good-for-nothings are left behind. Passion? Energy? Audacity? Uh-hum, let's toast another marshmallow. Canada has been fighting two revolutions all its life: The American and the French. No wonder old men and old ideas govern us. There's no room in this country for anything that's fresh and vigorous, challenging. Let's criticize the Americans! That's so much safer, isn't it? And so satisfying to the national inferiority complex! Do something? No, give us the old geezers like Diefenbaker and Pearson. Let's all have a good gabfest: and don't forget the critics who'll speak to us from their lofty Olympian heights. Their Serene Highnesses!

Well, here's one fellow who kicked the thing in the ass a long time ago. And intends to go on kicking it whenever and wherever it shows itself. There's one thing I am an expert on: flabbiness of will, of energy. I can smell the thing a million miles away. I reverence courage and high spirits and laughter. For the first time in many years, I'm beginning to see these things in Washington, and I for one am grateful and am ready to shout my thanks from the rooftops. The world has become an exciting place again, with new freshets being opened every day. I admire not only Kennedy, but the dynamic men and women he's gathered around him. At last the meaning of the American experience is being defined. Great times are ahead of us. It's a pity Canada and Canadians, accursed by geography and history, can never initiate anything, but must always be dragged in tow by her more powerful and energetic neighbour, but that's the way the ball bounces. For myself, I'm glad to be alive with JFK--more power to him!

Don't work so hard at persuading yourself I'm not a "megalomaniac" & a "braggart." Relax. And if you think I wear an ass's head--be compassionate (that's your favorite word, isn't it?) and stroke my long ears gently. Besides soothing me, it'll give you a pleasurable feeling of your own superiority over the failings and weaknesses of others.
Really, I envy you. For as my ears grow longer, your pleasure must increase, until they become yardsticks for your own moral achievement. For that reason alone, you ought to keep me as your everlasting friend.

And really I don’t mind your stroking my ears at all.

Hugs,

Irving

enclosure: ts "The Fictive Eye."

1The CBC did not produce "Up with Nothing."

2Claire Pratt, Professor of English at Mount Allison University.

3Irving Layton, "My Eyes Are Wide Open," The Swinging Flesh 154.

4Layton, "The Fictive Eye," The Swinging Flesh 188.

5Civil war broke out in Laos on November 29, 1960 between right-wing and left-wing forces backed by the United States and the Soviet Union respectively. The civil war gave rise to international tension in the following months, which was greatly dissipated with the exchange of personal messages between Kruschev and Kennedy in February 1961. At a press conference on March 23, 1961, Kennedy warned that the US "strongly and unreservedly supports the goal of a neutral and independent Laos."

The situation in the Congo Republic (formerly the Belgian Congo) in the later part of 1960 and early 1961 was marked by tension between Patrice Lumumba who claimed to be legal prime minister and lived in the official prime minister’s residence under UN protection, and Colonel Mobutu and President Kasawbu; in November 1960 Mobutu’s troops captured Lumumba; in February he was killed. The Security Council met immediately and Kennedy, through American UN representative Adlai Stevenson, said "we must proceed in the Council to find a consensus on constructive measures which will help restore peace and stability to the Congo...In the meantime, we earnestly appeal to all governments to avoid any steps which might further aggravate or inflame the situation..."

6John Diefenbaker (1895—1979), Prime Minister 1957—63, was 65 at the time of this letter; Lester ("Mike") Pearson (1897—1972), leader of the Opposition and Prime Minister 1963—68, was 63.

April 1, 1961

Dear Desmond,

Wonderful news and I share all your delight and excitement. Now I’ll be able to hear your Bishop’s talk! That talk must have been a real wow, since it seems to have woken up the CBC. But above all I’m delighted you’re going to be in Montreal this month. That’s good news indeed. Of course you are going to stay with us. Come straight here—no, I’ll pick you up at the station. Let me know which train you’re taking—CNR or CPR—and I’ll be waiting for you.

Tomorrow I’m leaving for Toronto. I’m addressing the English branch of the Ontario Educational Association on the subject of Literature in the Schools. Since I don’t have to be in Toronto before Tuesday morning I might stop over at Kingston and see Douglas LePan or Malcolm Ross.

Aviva is particularly happy that you’re going to stay with us, since she wants to read you some of her children’s
stories. McClelland & Stewart have them under consideration just now. She's just finished a new one--wants to get another book done before the summer is over. And maybe I'll have some new poems to show you. Let me have your opinion on "The Fictive Eye."

I do look forward very much to seeing you and having a good talk. Until then keep well & happy.

Love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving


357. April 5, 1961

Dear Irving,

Thank you very much for your letters of March 31 and April 1.

I'll be delighted to have you meet me--and to stay with you. I'll be coming CPR & arriving early on the morning of April 18--about 9am I think it is.

Are you sure you have room for me? If I should in any way inconvenience you, please be frank, & I'll get a hotel room.

Hope your talk went well in Toronto. I spoke on the same subject (English in the Schools) this morning to the County Superintendents of Schools from all over NB--& really let them have it!

I like "The Fictive Eye" very much--very gay, lovely irony--first rate.

Re your previous letter--I'm not really as supercilious & smug as you accuse me of being--in fact I'm anything but. I enjoy insulting you once in a while--& you seem to enjoy insulting me! But at heart I love you!

As ever,
Des Pacey

358. April 12, 1961

Dear Irving,

I am sorry to have to tell you that my visit of next week is off. I am terribly disappointed to miss the chance of seeing you again, but I am afraid I have no alternative. The explanation is as follows:

From the early correspondence of this "Association des Editeurs Canadiennes" I gathered that the choice of the best books was to be a bilingual one, and in my list I included both French & English titles. But when, on Monday of this week, I received their list of nominated books, it was wholly French. Now I have not read enough of the French-Canadian books to set myself up as a judge of the best of them, so I am reluctantly withdrawing from the jury.
So our little get-together is off. But I hope to be in Montreal in June, so we shan’t have too long to wait.

My Anthology talk has been postponed from April 14 to April 21 because of this week’s Stanley Cup final!

All the best--in haste,
Des Pacey

April 16, 1961

Dear Desmond,

We’re all very disappointed that you’re not going to be in Montreal. We’d been looking forward to your visit and Aviva had looked to the linen, meals, etc. For myself, I was anticipating some real bull sessions with you on Kennedy, Castro, the future prospects of poetry, and numerous other subjects. We would have had a grand time over some drinks. Still, you do say you’ll be here in June, and that again gives us something to look forward to. Whenever you come, the whiskey and the welcome will be waiting for you (Count the w’s in that last sentence, Whew!)

Some good news! It now looks as if our first play, "Lights on the Black Water," is going to be put on by GM. I have a letter\(^1\) from George McCowan,\(^2\) the fellow who produced "The Connection" in Toronto, telling me how much he was impressed by the play. He’s very keen on producing it and says there’s "a great possibility" that he will. It certainly looks very hopeful. When I was in Toronto, I heard several people say he was the best TV producer in the country and that he pretty much calls his own tune. As for our last play, "Up With Nothing," the story is even more encouraging. We read it to Weaver when he was here and he liked it so much he took the script back with him. Since then I’ve received a letter from Mrs Doris Gauntlett (Special Scripts Dept) and all I can say now is that it all looks very, very promising. Don’t be surprised if I write you during the next few days to tell you that both plays have definitely been taken by the CBC. A consummation devoutly to be wished.\(^3\)

I’m glad you like "The Fictive Eye." I think it’s a fine lyric and a fine addition to The Swinging Flesh. Jack McClelland was very patient with me, very co-operative. You know I had a burst of inspiration while the book was in production and wrote four poems. Well, all of them are going to be in the book. So as it now stands The SF will contain 10 short stories and forty-three poems, besides the "Foreword" which you read when you were here. Altogether, about 200 pages. Newfeld\(^4\) has designed a magnificent cover for the book--Rubenesque flesh, skeleton, red and gold colours. Very, very eye-taking. I spoke to Jack last week and he said the book ought [to] be out by the 20th of this month. You can imagine how my fingers are itching. Or rather you know!

My collaborator, Leonard Cohen, has chosen the moment to be in Cuba. What a time! I wrote him several days ago
to leave the place, but quickly. Don’t think I’m not worried. I am, plenty. There’s no doubt the opposition means business, and it’s only a matter of weeks or days, before full-scale invasions will begin. This is no time for a footloose reckless poet to find himself on the island. Poor, poor Castro. I am sorry for him. He’s a prisoner of forces beyond his control or willing. I don’t think he’s too happy with his present role of totalitarian despot, dependent upon the USSR. In his innermost soul, he must know that the course which present-day Cuba has embarked on is absurdly stupid. The Eisenhower regime is not guiltless of the blood that is soon to be spilled, of the oncoming tragedy. My greatest sympathy, of course, is for the Cuban people. What a world!

Gagarin and Eichmann—how many can see the symbolic significance of the flight of the one and the trial of the other? Isn’t it ironic that the former, the very symbol of our collectivist era, the passive violently propelled into space by a team of scientists and politicos, should be called "The Wild Duck"? Applause, speeches: the Russian version of bread and circuses. But everybody is excited, while the Eichmann trial which goes to the very roots of human perversity already elicits only apathy and bored yawns. What a race of children, of nincompoops, men are. Forgive these gloomy meditations.

Love, Irving

1George McCowan, letter to Irving Layton, 10 Apr. 1961, Layton Papers, Concordia University.

2George McCowan (b. 1928), CBC television director, later a film (Face-Off 1971, The Frogs 1971) and television director (Charlie’s Angels, Fantasy Island) in the United States.


4Frank Newfeld (b. 1928), book designer, publishing consultant; joined McClelland & Stewart in 1963 as Art Director, became creative director in 1965, vice-president in 1969 and director, 1974-82.

5On March 21, 1961, a Cuban Revolutionary Council combining a number of groups opposed to the Castro regime was formed, with headquarters in New York city. On April 15 three light bombers piloted by defecting officers of the Cuban Air Force made simultaneous dawn attacks on Cuban military airfields and then landed in Miami and Key West. Two days later, the Bay of Pigs abortive invasion occurred; a small force of Cuban exiles, armed and trained by the CIA, landed on Bahia de Cochinas. After three days of fighting, Cuban forces achieved what Castro described as "a total victory."

6Yuri Gagarin (1935-68), Soviet cosmonaut, became the first man in space on April 12, 1961, when his Vostok I spaceship orbited the earth once and made a successful re-entry. The trial of Adolf Eichmann was underway in Israel at the same time; he was hanged on May 31, 1962.
360.[pc]  
April 21, 1961  
Dear Desmond,

The Left-wing intellectual—what a sorry decadent he is today. O yes, I read him, Huberman¹ and Sweezy,² and C. Wright Mills,³ and The New Left Review⁴ published in England. All the usual shibboleths about "moribund capitalism", "American imperialism,""Socialistic virtue," etc, etc. They are the true Bourbons of our time: they have forgotten nothing and learned nothing. What contemptible dunderheads!

What howls they'll let out if J.F.K (as I devoutly pray for) sends American soldiers and divisions to overthrow the Castro regime. At last we have a clear-thinking and resolute defender of freedom, one with guts and stamina and nerves of steel. No wonder the socialistic blabbermouths fear and hate him. O that I had oceans of venom to spew on them!

Yours,
Irving


²See 152.4.

³C. Wright Mills (1916-62), American sociologist at Columbia University best known for numerous works documenting contemporary American politics such as The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders (1948), and The New Power Elite (1956).

⁴The New Left Review is a wide-ranging left-wing periodical formed in 1960 by the union of Universities and Left Review and the New Reasoner; it continues today. Mills' "Letter to the New Left" appeared in issue #5.

361.[pc]  
April 21, 1961  
Dear Desmond,

At last we have a leader of democracy who means business. Thank heaven, thank heaven, thank heaven. I read the President's reply to Kruschev's note,¹ and my eyes almost fell out of their sockets with astonishment and delight. I fervently hope J.F.K follows up last night's talk and gives active support to the Cuban exiles. This time there'll be no ignominious Suez. If we want freedom we shall have to fight for it. Our so-called intellectuals make big with the words--what's wanted today is guts. For cowardice masking itself as reason, etc, etc I've always had the profoundest contempt. Kennedy si; Kruschev & Castro, non!

Love, Irving
On April 11, while fighting was in progress in Cuba, Kruschev sent Kennedy a message stating the Soviet Union's intention to give the Cuban government and people "all necessary assistance in beating back the armed attack on Cuba," and calling on the United States to "prevent the flames of war kindled by the interventionists in Cuba from spreading into a conflagration." Kennedy replied "we will immediately honor our obligations under the inter-American system to protect this hemisphere against external aggression." In a speech on April 20 to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Kennedy declared that the US did "not intend to be lectured on intervention by those whose character was stamped for all time on the bloody streets of Budapest."

362. 
April 24, 1961

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of April 16.

I am delighted to know that the prospects are good for the acceptance by the CBC of both your TV plays.

I disagree with you (as usual) almost completely on the Cuban situation. Castro's is the only real revolution in Latin America since the Mexican Revolution, and since the USA fears the spread of such revolutions she must assert her imperialist claims—just as Britain tried to do in Suez. But she will not succeed, & Mr J.F.K will lose a lot of face. Kennedy is no angel—he's a capitalist & imperialist with very vague liberal leanings. Your pity for Castro would be amusing if it were not so obviously a mask. Why is he dependent on the USSR? Because the USA kicked him in the teeth! Your political sagacity, sir, is absolutely nil! Thank God you're a better poet than a politician!

Did you hear my Anthology talk? 1 I thought Steinhouse did a very good job of cutting a 40 minute talk down to 15 without making it seem too truncated or non-consecutive.

Terribly disappointed not to see you last week, but eagerly looking forward to June. Meanwhile—stacks of exams to mark!

Love,
Des Pacey

1See 354.1.

363. 
April 24, 1961

Dear Desmond,

Now what? The "invasion" of Cuba is over; there's not likely to be another one—not in the near future anyhow. Half-heartedness is the surest guarantee of failure. When the Russians act, they do so determined to succeed. In Hungary and East Germany, they sent their Communist tanks against "workers and peasants." They let others worry about the black eye the deed gave them. Unless we in the West learn to act with the same toughness and conviction it is all over with us. The Russians have now established an outpost in the Caribbean: it is no secret their agents are swarming all over Latin America and Mexico.

Our intellectuals who should be the first to give the alert are asleep or still mumbling old shibboleths. If
they’re finally gagged as they are today in Poland, Czechoslovakia, etc—they will have handsomely deserved it. As JFK has warned the democracies, this is no era for "soft societies." I’ve been saying just that for years.

Perhaps, after all, it was a good thing the so-called "invasion" was a failure. The Americans now know what kind of enemy they’re up against. Had the Marines gone in and mopped up the Castroists, the Am people would have gone to sleep again to dream of new breakfast foods and toothpastes. I think there will be less opposition to the Kennedy program as a result of this latest fiasco. There will have to be a vast house-cleaning. Old institutions, old habits will have to go. I hope that Cuba will be the needed catalyst to drive our effete democracies in the direction they must go if they are to survive. I think it will. Largely, my confidence rests on my estimate of one man—Kennedy. He’s a quick learner, and he’s tough. Unlike the social democrats, he has shown he can act. Mistakes, of course, he’ll make (the recent "not this, not that" in Cuba is one of them) but I predict they’ll get fewer and fewer as time goes on and he learns his business. What I’d like to see him do is mount a full-scale offensive for freedom: economic, political, cultural. The Soviet empire is vulnerable at many points, especially in the realm of ideas. The war between them and us is an ideological one—if we don’t win it I’m not interested in living in the kind of world that would shape up as a consequence of our defeat. If I had to live in a Hungary or an East Germany, I’d cut my throat first. And the throats of my children.

The most significant political fact of our time is that revolutions are made by discontented middle-class intellectuals. The "revolutionism" of the proletariat is the greatest myth of the 20th Century. When the revolution is made, one of these intellectuals then seizes complete power and using "expropriation" and "naturalization" as levers, proceeds to establish a police state to ensure his despotism. The greatest paradox of all is this: socialism, the dream of 19th C liberals & humanists, has led everywhere to tyranny. The pattern I have described can be observed in Russia, China, and now in Cuba. It should also be recalled that Hitler named his movement National Socialism. Of course I’m not equating Nazism with Communism; what I am doing is to show they have the same seed-bed in the malfunctioning of the capitalist system; that the discontented intellectuals who come mainly from the middle-class can push and do in one direction or the other. Unless we can find an alternative to give our frustrated intellectuals; unless we can extend freedom, democracy, and give the hungry people of the world in Asia, Africa, and Latin America hope for food as well as freedom, Communist regimentation is inevitable. That’s as plain to me as the nose on your face—or mine.

Feeble-heartedness: palavering, that favourite pastime of social democratic intellectuals; introspective scab-
pulling; the unwillingness or inability to dare greatly--these are the things that will pull us down. The West must produce its own Castros and Mao Tse-Tungs. Thank heaven for De Gaulle--and J.F.K. There's still hope. The next ten years are going to see many dramatic changes. It's an exciting world, and there ARE causes to fight for, the greatest being to keep alive freedom in which the creative spirit of man can flourish.

Yrs,
Irving

364. [c April 25, 1961]

David Lewis taught me the first principles of Socialism way back in 1929 when I was the leader of the Young People's Socialist League.¹

He's one of the Bourbons I'm talking about, the purest intelligence-free examples of Socialist blabber-mouthing I know.

enclosure: "Problems Involved In Intervention" (editorial)

¹The Young People's Socialist League (YPSL, "Yipsel") was a left-wing youth organization founded in 1928 in Montreal and led by David Lewis throughout the 1930's.

365. April 26, 1961

Dear Irving,

Having received your two postcards of April 21 and your letter of April 24, I am prepared to bracket you with the later Wordsworth. Your attitude on Cuba reminds me of that of Wordsworth to the First Reform Bill, which that once-enthusiastic supporter of the French Revolution declared to be the cause of the outbreak of cholera in England: God's judgment upon the nation for its radicalism.¹

Are you mad? You talk about the left-wingers using the old catch-phrases, but what is your own "freedom in which the creative spirit of man can flourish"? Do you seriously maintain that you would support an American invasion of Cuba? Well of course you are the man--the only man, I suspect--who managed to support both the British invasion of Suez and the Russian attack on Hungary. Your political philosophy seems to be "brutality on all fronts" & the more brutal the better. And how do you feel now that your doughty champion J.F.K has let you down & admitted that he was given bad advice on Cuba?

What I can't understand is why you weren't Duplessis's² literary champion. Surely you approved his police attacks on the Louisville strikers? Why didn't you expose the leftish catch-phrases of Frank Scott et al about freedom of the press etc in Quebec? Why keep all your fascistic views for foreign policy?
I gather that you were so preoccupied with politics (and your love-affair with Jackie) that you did not listen to my Bishop’s talk when it was broadcast on Anthology last Friday night. Well, I shall do my best not to watch you when you next make your fulsome bow on Fighting Words.

I feel like administering a swift kick in the pants to you, you opinionated crypto-fascist. Why don’t you emigrate to the United States so that you would be eligible to replace Robert Frost on the podium at the next inauguration (if the States lasts that long!).

With sympathy & understanding,
Your catch-phrase liberal dupe,
Desmond "Pinky" Pacey


2 Maurice Duplessis (1890-1959), lawyer, politician and Premier of Quebec from 1936-39 and 1944-59, infamous for dealing harshly with striking workers--especially at Asbestos and Louisville--and for disdaining contemporary concepts of civil liberties, as in the Roncarelli case (see 428.1).


4 The red flag is the international symbol of communism; therefore one thought to be leaning towards communism is called pink or a pinto.

366.

April 29, 1961

Dear Pinky Slip,

There’s not much point, really, in arguing with someone who hollers "brutality", "fascist" each time I suggest the democracies must be resolute and forceful—as resolute and forceful as their communist adversaries. Evidently you live in some cloudy cuckooland of your own where words take on queer shades of meaning when they enter your fantastic kingdom. Your devotion to your socialist past and F.R. Scott’s is infinitely touching: it must give you a wonderful sense of security—of stability—to be able to trot out sterile cliches like "colonialism", "American imperialism", etc. I envy you! For you the world has stood still. As it has for thousands of other leftist intellectuals who mistake sentimentality and nostalgia for idealism, and impotence for wisdom. You’re in for a rude shock—all of you. You can be sure of one thing, Pinky Pacey: neither Kruschev nor Kennedy are going to let you sleep this one out. They’ll force you to choose sides, and when they do, you’ll all have to decide where you stand. In the new currency that will soon be required from each of us, no one, and least of all the SB’s (socialist blabbermouths) will be able to palm off bonelessness for lofty idealism.

Kennedy’s mistake was not in allowing the so-called "invasion" of Cuba to take place, but in relying so much on faulty CIA intelligence. To equate Kennedy’s "go-ahead" to
the Cuban emigres’ wishing to restore freedom to their unhappy country with "imperialism" is socialistic bullshit. I may, Pinky, be wrong about many things, but about two things I’m seldom or never wrong: my intuitions about people and about the status of freedom. Kennedy is on my side, and he’s fighting my own battle for freedom. I’m thankful to whatever powers there be, that he’s young, tough, and realistic. His socialistic detractors and critics seem to me both asinine and cowardly. And isn’t it like Canada and Canadians to sit on the sidelines and wax self-righteous and admonitory while the Americans are left nearly alone to wrestle with the most stupendous problem in history, how to prevent freedom from being extinguished over the earth’s surface. No, my dear friend, mediocrity (for which read, Canadians and Socialists) will never impress me. I’m interested in greatness. And whenever I find it, you may be sure I’ll recognize and venerate it. De Gaulle is Great; Winston Churchill is Great; Kennedy is Great; David Lewis is Not Great, nor are Tommy Douglas of Sask or FR Scott. The day for great Socialists is over. There’ll never again be another Ferdinand Lassalle, or a Jean Jaurés, or even an Aneusin Bevan.

I wrote you in an earlier letter: what the poet intuits today, lesser mortals will be saying a year or five years from now. Go ahead and call me arrogant. So were my forbears, the Hebrew prophets. What made them so insufferably cocky is the same thing that makes me so: a sense of history, that is, a sense of the human drama, of character in action. I Know that Kruschev and Co are evil men, and communism an evil philosophy. I Know that the only way of stemming it altogether is by fighting it, as the Kennedy Administration is fighting it, with intelligence and courage. With chaps like you around, Pinky, they’ve got a tough battle on their hands. But their faith, like my own, is that the free world will recognize before it’s too late just what the issues are. It’ll take time, but unless Heine was dead right when he said, "Against stupidity even the gods fight in vain" the tide will begin to turn in Kennedy’s favor—and it must.

In the meantime, you can help yourself to clarity if you were to read the following books: Djlis: The New Class; Milosz: The Captive Mind; Rostow: The Stages of Economic Growth; Cantril’s Soviet Leaders and Mastery Over Men. In your arguments with me, I think you sometimes forget that I hold an MA in Political Science and Economics, and that in my undergraduate days I was considered the white-haired boy of the Department and given a teaching Fellowship. So stop patronizing me as a poet who has somehow strayed into the alien field of politics (I ate and slept and drank politics while you were still an innocent—not that you aren’t one still!) and read some solid books on the subject. Don’t trot out old hackneys and expect me to be impressed by them. Ye gods, at least read Strachey’s
Contemporary Capitalism before you toot off about "American imperialism" and so on.

Well, to happier matters—not but that I love you, despite your obtuseness. I mailed you a copy of The Swinging Flesh. It’s a handsome book, and of course I hope you’ll like its contents. I’m sorry to have missed your program, but I had a lecture to give that evening. You may be sure I wd have enjoyed hearing myself praised. This Tuesday I leave for Toronto and the Can Arts Conference. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irv

1See 365.4; Layton is also playing on "pink slip" in the sense of a notice of dismissal.

2Tommy Douglas (1904-86), Baptist minister, politician and socialist Premier of Saskatchewan 1944-61, leader of the federal New Democratic Party 1967-71; recognized as the father of socialized medicine in Canada.

3Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-64), German regarded as one of the theoretical founders of socialism and a leading organizer of the labour movement in Germany. In 1863 he helped found the General German Worker’s Association which led to the formation of the Social-Democratic Party.

4Jean Jaurès (1859-1914), French socialist political leader, philosopher and historian; founder of the newspaper L’Humanité in 1904, and editor until his death.

5Aneusin Bevan (1897-1960), leader of the left-wing ("Bevanites") of the Labour Party in post World War II British politics, architect of the National Health Service; his autobiography In Place of Fear appeared in 1952.


367. May 3, 1961
Dear Desmond,

I bought the Colonial Advocate downstairs in the lobby to read your article on Bliss Carman. The issue is beside me as I write, and I can’t help thinking there’s an amazing facial resemblance between the picture of Bliss Carman on the cover and your own physiognomy. If you let your hair grow as long as his, the resemblance, I think, would be complete. Anyhow, I enjoyed your article very much—had it with my poached eggs, and several times found myself putting an empty fork into my mouth. Your prose has taken on a rhythmic grace it once did not have, or had only fitfully. You make judgements without appearing censorious or stuffy,
and without seeming to exalt yourself at the expense of your subject. Let's have more articles like this one.

Cohen is back from Cuba. Nothing he has told me about recent happenings there has changed my mind. The totalitarian control over men's minds and bodies is even more terrible than I imagined. If that's your great socialist revolution, you are welcome to it. For myself, I shall fight it with my last breath. However, don't misunderstand my position, and don't misrepresent it. I'm not in favor of barren anti-communism. The thinking I've done over the past few years has left me convinced that communism is a punishment for our complacency, for our murderous indifference to the plight of our fellow-men. If communist totalitarian rule is finally imposed on Canadians and Americans, it will be because we were too stupid or too cowardly to heed the warning signals going up all around us. I am utterly and forever convinced that the survival of freedom in this evil world depends upon the United States in partnership with Great Britain. I can understand people criticizing the mismanagement and indecisiveness behind the so-called Cuban "invasion", but when [they] only gloat over President Kennedy's "mistake", they sicken and depress me. We--the forces of freedom--have lost a battle, we have not lost the war. If the fiasco in the Bay of Pigs arouses the Americans to the danger that threatens their liberties and convinces them that [they] must give up trivialities and some of their comforts in order to secure them, and that their best security for freedom lies in extending it to other countries, it might turn out to be the proverbial blessing in disguise.

The choice is between Kennedy and Castro. I choose Kennedy. A great number of intellectuals, you among them, have chosen Castro. We part company here. The lessons of Stalinism have been well-learned by me; they have been forgotten by others. More to the point, the Castroites have not understood the century they live in, or the forces shaping it. They are victims of sloganized thinking, clichés, or obscure emotional promptings and motivations, the classic sense of frustration and impotency most intellectuals feel and which makes them want to ally themselves to a successful bully and condottiere. You telling me I love brutality for its own sake, when you are prepared to justify every outrage against human dignity in the name of revolution. Do you know any more macabre jokes?

You sadden and depress me, my friend,

Irving.

PS Get hold of Harper's May issue. Special supplement: "The Mood of the Russian people."1

Dear Desmond,

A postscript to yesterday’s letter. Almost the first thing Leonard said to me about Castro was, "He’s a tragic figure." Without any prompting from me, you understand. He believes him to be, as I do, a genuine revolutionary who because of pressures and historical circumstances, has been compelled to deviate from his own often-announced humanism. My whole point is that the Cuban business has been a tragedy both for Castro and for the present American Administration which inherited a reactionary CIA and a revolutionary Cuba humiliated and opposed by the previous Administration. The result—Communist totalitarianism in Cuba, and Kennedy’s image as a progressive liberal blurred. Well, I’m not going to cheer or gloat over either outcome. I view both consequences as very tragic indeed. My faith in Kennedy has not been shaken the least bit. I’ll go along with a man who’s willing to do something—not merely palaver—though he might fall flat on his face. That’s why I’ve never trusted the Social Democrats: they talk. Our job is to match the toughness and determination of the communists—but for democracy, for human values. We have to show the world that the price for increased mass-consumption need not be thought-control, regimentation. I want to see a militant democracy. My hope is that Kennedy will give us that, for if he doesn’t we’re sunk. The West, to survive, must not only learn to live with Revolutions but encourage them. For if we don’t, the Communists will. But if we do fail, don’t ask the Pasternaks and Laytons to extol tyranny and tyrants.

All the best,
Irving


1Pasternak’s novel Doctor Zhivago was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1958 when it appeared in the West despite the fact it had been refused publication in the Soviet Union; as a result, Pasternak was expelled from the Soviet Writer’s Union and threatened with expulsion from the Soviet Union unless he rejected the Prize and issued a letter of public apology (which he did).

Dear Irving,

I have before me three of your letters—those of April 29, May 3, and May 4. I haven’t answered them before, partly because I knew there was no point in writing while you were in Toronto, & partly because I have been so busy marking examination papers that I have had no time to think.

Well, it has been most interesting to see you gradually toning down your remarks on the Cuban fiasco, until finally you are merely saying that at least Kennedy was trying to do something. The fact is of course that he was completely
misled by [the] CIA and that he has dealt himself & his country a blow which may yet prove irreparable.

Don't get me wrong—I am not, nor ever was, anti-Kennedy. I believe he is several cuts above Eisenhower, and that he means well & that he may succeed in reinvigorating the USA in particular and the West in general. But I do not blindly worship him, as you seem to do—remember that he is the son of an American millionaire, that he is Catholic, that he is a Harvard man, that he has close connections with the Sinatra 'clan' etc & that all these things inevitably bind him & blind him to some degree. More & more people are coming to see that most of his speeches are merely cleverly re-phrased expressions of rather hackneyed ideas. He has a clever group of speech-writers, but sooner or later he must begin to deliver the goods. He picked a very bad place to begin delivery!

I think you are grossly over-simplifying the issues before us. You are talking in terms of democratic whites & blacks—whereas actually we have a great variety of greys. Most English & Canadian observers of the Cuban situation report that Castro has 80 or 90% of the Cuban people behind him, that his revolution is essentially a Cuban rather than a Russian one, & that he has turned to Russia for support simply because from the very first the Americans tried to sabotage his uprising. You have a strange set of allies in people like Allen Dulles! And you have the effrontery to call me naive! Your political naivete is truly awe-inspiring!

However, I think we had better just agree to differ on politics, & turn our attention to literature. On that subject, I have almost nothing to report from this end as I have been immersed in exam papers. But, I do want from you a report, in full detail, of that fucking Conference in Toronto. It can't have been any good, since I was not invited to participate. What a pissing bunch of panelists they had on Canadian letters (not fit for French letters) with bearded English snobs like Arnie (look at me Robertson) Edinborough. I'll bet the whole thing was a complete waste of time & money except for the extramarital screwing which went on in the hotel bedrooms. Did you find yourself a nice little female poetess to feel up? You old literary lecher you, I'll bet you did.

Your book to hand—have read the poems & think they are tremendous. Have only read so far only two or three of the stories—and don't particularly like them. Your style, in them, is stiff, self-conscious, almost 'arch'. You're just not at home in that medium, sir. Woof! Woof! Don't bite!

Love,
Des P

1The Sinatra "clan" (Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr, Peter Lawford et al) campaigned for Kennedy during the 1960 election. Actor Lawford was married to Kennedy's sister, Pat.
Dear Desmond,

Please read over my letters again. The real argument between us is the greatness of Kennedy. I said he'd go down in history as one of [the] truly great Presidents of the United States. I defended him against your charges that he was an "American imperialist", etc, etc. I labelled all those familiar terms as so much left-wing tripe, which of course it was. Your last letter repeats the familiar clichés: you still can't see that socialism is now a dead issue, about as vital and interesting as last year's snow. America is not Europe, and its evolution will be a different and, I believe, a more glorious one. About the only thinker in this country who seems to have understood what the real issues of our time are, and what has been happening in the world the last three decades is--Frank Underhill. See his article in the present issue of the Canadian Forum.¹ He's the only socialist who has managed to clear his head of useless lumber and to look at the world with realism leaving the attractive left-wing stances to others. If you read the article carefully, you'll note that his views on the stagnation of socialist thinking are identical with those of my own. He even calls for a Democratic party in Canada, something that I wished for many, many years ago when I reviewed Laski's book on American civilization,² saying then that Laski's demand for a Labour Party in the USA showed his European limitations.

How does the issue stand between us?

I supported the invasion against Castro, because I believed that it was a genuine movement to unseat a dictator. I was mistaken: so was Kennedy: the CIA got in between us and our hopes. In the light of what we now know, it was ludicrous to land 1,000 Cubans on the beachheads and hope to drive Castro and his supporters from the island. However, that sort of mistake anyone can make--it is a mere particular that does not alter the large outlines of the situation, which the wise man will focus on. They are:

1. Castro has taken Cuba along the road of Communist totalitarianism. He has betrayed the Cuban revolution. You think differently.

2. Castro has isolated Cuba from Latin America: it is the poor Cuban people who will have increasingly to pay the price in the coming years. You think differently.

3. It is "socialistic blabbermouthing" to speak of American imperialism (as you have done in almost every letter) and to accuse Kennedy (as you have also done) of being an "imperialist stooge". It is this position of yours that particularly aroused my ire.

May 13, 1961

370.
4. I said that recent events were a tragedy for both Castro and the United States. Instead of appreciating the poetic depth of that statement, you accused me of shedding hypocritical tears for Castro. I think it must be evident even to you—seeing how thought control has been fastened on the Cuban people, terror, executions, etc—that a tragedy it has been and is.

5. I said that Castro's revolution suffered from Communist sterility. It has no future in Latin America. You said it was the only genuine revolution in Latin America since the one in Mexico, and was the harbinger of many more. If you've been reading the press lately, you'll have observed that Latin-American opinion is slowly but surely turning against Castro. His friends in this hemisphere more and more are turning out to be mild professors in Canadian colleges.

6. I said that Kennedy was a great President. And I said it, allow me to add, when almost everyone was ready to count him out—including yourself. References to his Harvard background, wealth etc, etc. Please read my letters again. I said this—before, during and after the Cuban fiasco—that Kennedy would go down in history as one of the very great Am presidents, if not one of the greatest figures of the 20th C. Our disagreement on the stature of Kennedy is clear and unequivocal. And that as well as the meaning of America for the world today, are the real issues dividing a socialist old-timer like yourself from me.

It's not so much that you are "naive", but that you lack a sense of history. And that is something that is the consequence, not of logic and reading, but of intuition. Kennedy, as now even Rostow concedes, has it. So have I. It's the prophetic strain in me. It's because I feel this is an important issue—intuition or commonsense—that I'm making so much of our present political differences. If I can persuade you that there are other and better ways of knowing than the laborious one of observation, analysis, and so on, perhaps you will incorporate that into your criticism. At the Conference, I blasted away at Frye for saying that modern art was becoming more academic and scholarly. Frye is an absolute blight on the Canadian literary landscape, and I intend to lash out at him whenever I can. The poet is not a scholar, he's a lover, a seer. Damn Frye! My blast was well-received and made the news. The story was carried right across the country. Why doesn't anyone else besides me tell Frye he simply doesn't know what he's talking about?

Why you weren't asked to attend the Conference is beyond me. You've done more for Canadian writing than anyone else in the country; you're genuinely concerned over it, written books and articles and reviews about it—my own debt to you is enormous; this very correspondence, among other things—yet Birney is asked, and you're not. It doesn't make sense. Of course you didn't miss much. The panel discussions were the usual verbal pancakes and the set
speeches pretty much what one expects at such affairs. However, for me the best thing that came out of the Conference was meeting a lot of people who were just names to me before. I met the West Indian novelist, George Lamming. Mordecai Richler was also there, and Hugh MacLennan. I was able to get Bissell’s ear for ten minutes to give him my views on Canada Council grants. Sir Ernest MacMillan and his wife beamed at me. Anne Hébert was too nervous to read. Jay Macpherson’s boatman put everyone to sleep. Leonard Cohen read beautifully, and he looked more Dorian Grayish than ever. Bob Weaver chaired the poetry reading, looking like an overgrown pixie.

My stories, arch? stiff? Well, hold your seat. I think they’re the best thing since Joyce’s Dubliners, and they have much more to say. But they’re strictly not for Canadians—as one charming European lady who lived through the horrors of Belsen told me after she had finished "Mrs. Polinov." To date, three reviews disagree with you. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irv


2Irving Layton, rev. of The American Democracy: A Commentary and an Interpretation by Harold Laski

3Layton’s opposition to the speeches delivered at the Canadian Conference of the Arts was the subject of an article in Toronto’s Globe and Mail:

Speeches made at the opening plenary session of the Canadian Conference of the Arts at the O’Keefe Centre yesterday were pompous and pretentious and worthy of a Russian cultural commissar, poet Irving Layton declared last night.

..."I don’t agree with the line taken in all those speeches today. I don’t want scholarship confused with art. The scholars and critics should not assume that the poet exists so that they can anatomize his corpse."


4George Lamming (b. 1927), Barbadian novelist and essayist, author of In the Castle of My Skin (1953), and Natives of My Person (1972).

5Sir Ernest MacMillan (1893—1973), composer and Conductor, Toronto Symphony Orchestra (1931—56), Dean, Faculty of Music, University of Toronto (1927—52); and Laura Elsie (Keith) Macmillan.

6Anne Hébert (b 1916),Québécoise poet (Le tombeau des rois, 1953) and novelist (Kamouraska 1970).


8James Joyce, Dubliners (London: Grant Richards, 1914).
Four reviews of The Swinging Flesh had appeared prior to May 13: unsigned reviews in the Peterborough Examiner (1 May 1961), the Winnipeg Tribune (6 May 1961) and the Winnipeg Free Press (6 May 1961), as well as George Woodcock's review in the Vancouver Sun (10 May 1961).

371. May 17, 1961

Dear Desmond,

Some comments and reflections on your draft review of The SF:

1. I have not lost my faith in Marxism or sex, since I never had any. Neither one is a subject for faith—only a professor would think otherwise. In broad outlook, I am as much of a Marxist as I always was. See my poem "Karl Marx", a very early statement of the quality of my Marxism. What I oppose are "lobotomized ideologues" of any camp. As for sex, my silly friend, one enjoys it, and it does remain my central symbol of life, and a convenient club to clobber an assorted group of deadbeats.

2. You miss the entire point of my "foreword". It's a statement, in my terms, (Not Milton's, who as a Protestant, was unable to achieve tragic vision) of what I believe to be the tragic vision for our time. Your call for affirmation is the kind of jejune cowboyish Canadianism that makes an artist like myself despair. Please read the "foreword" over again and let the anger and the subtlety sink into your consciousness. Remember that I am a Hebrew, that is, I'm two thousand years older than you. My sort of affirmation is that of the poet, the artist (the last word is always the poet's) not of someone who has fed himself silly on literary Horatio Algers. How can you say on the one hand that I'm arrogant, and on the other that I despair and negate? If you read the whole book carefully, you will see that what I am doing is to equate the human with the poetic, and what I'm saying is that they're both menaced by a monstrously cold and inhuman civilization. Nevertheless, nowhere do I say that the human is not worthwhile preserving and fighting for, or that it will not triumph in the end. Samson Agonistes indeed! But he was blind. Your great artist never is. Of what I know and affirm in the teeth of stupidity, cruelty and philistinism I was never more certain than I am today. Your review of my book gives an entirely false and misleading picture—what's more you will find yourself entirely alone in your presentation of it. (How can you say in the same breath that I have lost my faith in poetry, sex, and Marxism is one of the things that makes me want to scream out with real pain and frustration.)

"Grim amusement from the spectacle of a civilization in flames"? Silly man, that last section is my statement of the tragic vision (not Yeats', whose vision was as phony as a 3-dollar bill) and my explanation for insensitive people like yourself of the double destiny of The Swinging Flesh—
movement and crucifixion. My god, how could you have missed it? Rhetoric, indeed!

3. There is dignity and grandeur in the stories—as Woodcock points out, humour and compassion and involvement. And the book does conclude with the poem to my mother, which is a mature and human statement that makes Blake and Milton and Yeats look pretty thin, anyway, less than human. But, after all, the Hebrew genius, lies just here—in its feeling, its awareness of the human. Forgive me, but to an Anglo-Saxon this will always be mistaken for "ranting".

4. Professors do live in "sheltering homes" and do not lead tempestuous lives. Period. Moreover, I have never been an 'academic', my connection with Sir George Williams university being limited to a single evening during the week. Here again, you give a totally false and misleading picture: this time, not of my work, but of myself.

Well, so much for the sparks, which you must have anticipated. I think you can write a better review than this one, if you get out of your skin (or of Milton’s and Yeats’) and see me as I am, or as I am trying to be. The Swinging Flesh is a subtle book made up of many tones and moods, of many different colours, but the dominant theme is that of the status of the poetic (human) in the world of actuality. I deal with the age-old tension of Art and civilization and present-day civilization has (despite your callow, jejune, on-the-button automatic-response optimism) given us Belsen and Nagasaki.

I’m enclosing Woodcock’s review and one from the Winnipeg Free Press. Kindly return.

Love,
Irving

enclosure: DP’s review of The Swinging Flesh with extensive marginalia:

The Swinging Flesh by Irving Layton (McClelland and Stewart, Toronto: 1961)

[Pacey’s first paragraph has been crossed out with the Layton note:] You spend too much time on the Preface. If it’s that silly as you pretend, why spend so much of your review discussing it? However, the Preface must be read alongside the poems and stories. Three-in-one, one-in-three.
...But he overstates his case: he lumps all professors together, forgetting that there are as many literary attitudes and personal experiences among professors as among any other group of the population; having been an academic himself he should know better than to assert that the life of a professor is any less tempestuous today than that of anyone else. And when he says that the poet today can only curse he is talking sheer poppycock. Curse some things no doubt he must—but the great poet of this age of any other age will fundamentally praise and bless.

It is perhaps because Mr Layton has himself lost his sense of direction that he is so angry. A lot of the time he seems to me to be shouting to distract attention from his own uncertainties. Most great poets—and lest anyone misconstrue all this as an attack on Layton rather than on some of his more extreme statements, I insist that Layton is as near to greatness as any Canadian poet is or has been—most great poets move, as Milton did, as Blake did, as Yeats and Eliot did, from the uncertainty of youth to the certainty of maturity. Layton, on the other hand, seems to be losing his certainties as he grows older: he has lost his Marxism, he is in danger of losing his faith in sex, and he seems even to be losing his faith in poetry ("the poet, in the inert, collectivist world order looming up before him can choose suicide or silence.") At the end of this foreword he does try to introduce an upbeat—but it amounts only to saying that the poet can extract some grim amusement* from the spectacle of a civilization in flames.

Probably all the above sounds very patronizing on my part—as if I were implying that Layton doesn’t have the answer, but that I do. Who can be anything but troubled, angry, frustrated in today’s world? My answer would be that the great poet should be able to see beyond the present discontents, that it is precisely his affirmative voice that we need.
...These poems are so full of warmth, tenderness, humanity and love that they convince me that poets should write only poems and leave the prefaces to prim professors. Layton practises so much better than he can preach!

"A Plausible Story," and Mrs Polinov" say more, and more acute things about the relationship between Art and Actuality than in all of Eliot, Yeats, Blake, and Milton, all rolled together.

As poet, thinker, and man, I am more certain of what constitutes the good life than ever before. I say so in The Swinging Flesh, though not in the callow & inartistic way you would wish me to say it. But that cannot be helped. That's why I wrote "The Philistine"--it's the kind of incomprehension that every true artist is up against. How you can say the absurd things you do about my having lost my sense of direction, after the letters and newspaper clippings I've been sending you over the years, is something that would dismay me, were I not made of sterner stuff.

Hugs,
Irving


1"Layton, on the other hand, seems to be losing his certainties as he grows older: he has lost his Marxism, he is in danger of losing his faith in sex, and he seems even to be losing his faith in poetry."

2Irving Layton, "Karl Marx," Now Is the Place 29.

3Pacey's review compares Layton's development to that of other poets:
...most great poets move, as Milton did, as Blake did, as Yeats and Eliot did, from the uncertainty of youth to the certainty of maturity....Through all the upheavals of the first two thirds of the seventeenth century Milton moved grandly forward to the magnificent tragic affirmation of Samson Agonistes....

4"I should like to see more of that dignity and grandeur in Layton, and a little less ranting."

5"At the end of this foreword he does try to introduce an upbeat--but it amounts only to saying that the poet can extract some grim amusement from the spectacle of a civilization in flames."
6. Layton refers to a passage from Woodcock's review:
They are concerned mostly with Layton's own world, the world of the Jewish community in Montreal, living on the edge of a fascinating but unpredictable French Canadian society; and they record it with involvement, with compassion, with humour, and in a rich but magnificently controlled prose.

7. Pacey objects to Layton's stereotype of the professor:
But he overstates his case: he lumps all professors together, forgetting that there are as many literary attitudes and personal experiences among professors as among any other group of the population; having been an academic himself he should know better than to assert that the life of a professor is any less tempestuous today than that of anyone else.

8. Belsen, site of a concentration camp in World War II, 16 kilometres northwest of Celle, Germany; Nagasaki is a seaport of Japan on the island of Kyushu; one of the two atomic bombs used against Japan in the Second World War was dropped on Nagasaki on 9 August 1945.

372. [pc]
May 18, 1961
Dear Desmond,
Do you see now why I'm so burned off with profs? You live in an unreal, remote world where words are substituted for actual things and events. Here I've been literally clobbering you over the head with Kennedy and his program for Freedom--have been doing it for over two months--and yet you can glibly write that I have lost my certainties and sense of direction. By what queer powers of thought did you arrive at this conclusion? Because I am for Kennedy and freedom--and recall again how arrogantly I've supported both--am I therefore less certain of my position than someone who supports Castro and Com totalitarianism? Please don't misrepresent me.

Hugs,
Irv

373. May 18, 1961
Dear Desmond,
To save you from error and damnation, I am enclosing two clippings from today's Montreal Star, and offer some further observations and comments.
1. The Swinging Flesh--man's true destiny of movement and martyrdom. The two are forever and indissolubly bound together. My tragic vision is historical (the influence of Marx), and not like that of Yeats', purely literary. For this reason your so-called bumbling optimism will always strike me as callow and jejune or, at best, a classroom stance.
2. You have a stereotype of me which you insist on treating patronizingly. That is of course much easier than coming to grips with my ideas or with the fundamental and inescapable fact that:
3. I am an artist, and that as such I believe in the dramatic confrontation of opposites (bless — curse, etc.). My job is to awaken the passions and provoke reflection: not write pamphlets that university lecturers can make easy summaries of. Only by reading and re-reading the three parts of *The Swinging Flesh* will the "faith" out of which the book has been conceived and born become manifest to you. To say as you do that I curse and despair is to say something which is as palpably untrue as it is silly. (Vide clippings.)

4. Bonfire = sex = creation = change = life. As long as the bonfire burns, there is always hope. What I condemn is present-day civilization, not poetry. "To hell with moaning and whining," etc, etc.

And believe me, Your devoted and patient friend,

Irving


374. [c. May 19, 1961]

Dear Desmond,

1. In a recent letter you said that America pushed Cuba into the waiting arms of the Soviets. I am enclosing a NY Times clipping for your further enlightenment.

2. The recent municipal elections in Gt Britain, in which the Labour candidates took an awful beating, vindicate my assertion to you that Socialism in the civilized world is no longer an interesting idea. Only reactionaries like yourself still cling to it.

3. You make the mistake of confusing Marxism with communism. This may come as news to you—-one doesn’t know how far the political innocence of an English professor extends—but it is possible to be the former without subscribing to the latter. I believe today, as I have for nearly three decades that Marxism provides us with some audacious generalizations fruitful for an understanding of the contemporary world. I have never been a member of the Communist party, and for most of my life have been in violent and outspoken opposition to its policies both here and abroad.

4. I must admit that your assertion that I have lost my sense of direction, my certainties, has shocked me out of my wits. The truth is that the past two years have seen me more confident, more sure of the rightness of my ideas and outlook than ever before in my life. That it should have escaped your notice, though you saw me several times during the period, read clippings of my activities, and had dozens of letters from me—-well, it simply baffles me.

Hugs,

Irving
375. May 21, 1961

Dear Desmond,

Did you see the review of The Swinging Flesh in Fredericton’s The Daily Gleaner?¹ It pleased me very much. The writer of it believed I was trying to say something about man and the world, and that the "Foreword", poems and stories added up to an effective utterance.²

Your own review, besides completely misrepresenting both myself and my book, is too glib by half. And the reason for your glibness is that like Frye you have the queer notion the poet is some kind of talented idiot who doesn’t really know what he’s doing, but who exists for the benefit of the critic who can show how much more discerning, disciplined, and wise they are than the poet whom the gods for a joke in poor taste have endowed with a gift which they, the critics, for all their immeasurable intellectual superiority, lack.

"A Dream of Perfection".³ But, of course! Now why should a chap who doesn’t know me personally and with whom I have not corresponded as I have with you for nearly a decade, have gotten the point which you missed seeing? Or George Woodcock? Or the reviewer in The Daily Gleaner? Remember, it’s not praise I am asking for, but understanding, a sensitive evaluation of what I’ve tried to do and of how well I’ve done it.

Forgive the intensity and bad temper. I’m back to normal again. And now to my next book. Another collection of short stories and poems.

Love,
Irving


²Morrison’s review praises the anger in Layton’s work:

Here is a man who is angry with the world, with people and with himself. His poems and short stories cut deeply, not the quick painless slicing of a scalpel; but the tearing, tortuous cut of jagged metal….And so he goes on in his Foreword. And so he goes on in his stories and poems. And I’m glad he does, for this is a voice to be listened to.

³Layton’s refers to a phrase from the review of The Swinging Flesh in the Winnipeg Free Press (see 371).
Dear Irving,

Just a hasty note to let you know that I am alive & wishing you all the best.

I am desperately busy. You see, I am due to come to Montreal for the Royal Society, NCCU\(^1\) etc on June 4, & I must try to complete my revision of *Creative Writing in Canada* before I come. (Yesterday, incidentally, I wrote the section on you,\(^2\) and I think you’ll like it. It’s practically all praise--& more discernment than usual!) I’ve been promising Ryerson Press all winter to have the revised ms to them by the end of May, & I’ve had so little time. Now lectures are over I must write like a bugger!

As for that review. I agree it was unfair & lopsided, but it was fun. I don’t see the point of dull, polite reviews--I think a review (as distinct from literary criticism) should be provocative, to catch the eye of the reader. My attack on your preface will cause far more interest in your book than a mild little round of applause from someone who is known to be your friend & admirer.

I’ve enjoyed all your letters & clippings. I love to hear from you--but please forgive me if I don’t write much if at all before I see you (all being well) on the evening of June 4. My present plan is to drive up in my new station wagon, but I’ll let you know if there are any changes.

Saw you on *FW* Sunday night\(^3\)--but a pretty dull session. Fancy Birney not recognizing Faulkner as "Count No-Count". Keep your pecker up!

Love & kisses,

Dessie Pacey

\(^1\)The annual meeting of the Royal Society was held 5-7 June 1961 at McGill University in Montreal.

\(^2\)The annual meeting of the National Council of Colleges and Universities.


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377. [tg] [May 25, 1961]

Dear Desmond,

Had seven extractions three crowns forgive stupid letters you’re a great and wonderful friend.

Irving Layton

378. [c May 26, 1961]

Dear Desmond,

Thanks for your letter. Looking forward very much to seeing you.

Have you read Trocchi’s\(^1\) *Cain’s Book*?\(^2\) I got him out of a jail by finding him a boat headed for England, after he had skipped bail in NY. Poor devil.

Love, Irving

1Alexander Trocchi (1925-84), Scottish novelist and editor, a founder and editor of Merlin (1952-55), author of the banned *Cain's Book*; associated with the Beat writers in New York where he moved in 1956, he fled to London in 1960 to evade drug charges.


379. c/o Rasmussen, RFD #1
Berlin, NH
Monday [July 10, 1961]

Dear Desmond,

Perhaps there's a letter of yours on the way here. We found this place last Thursday, after coming up & down the turnpikes and thruways of all the New England states, and throw in the state of New York for good measure. We were on the way back to Canada, very sad and very travel-wearied when we noticed a sign saying there were some cottages to rent at Cedar Pond. "O well, another three miles out of our way, but let's give it a try." It was really touch and go, but we decided to turn down the side road--and it was lucky we did. For we now have a lovely cottage overlooking a small lake where it's very quiet and where a short walk takes you to a grass-covered hill that enables you to look at a region of mountains and rolling hills, purple-hazed, and a delight to the eye.

There's been little sun so far, but I go for my walks, and I've discovered a meadow where I lie all day reading and composing poems. It's a great life.

"To A Lily"¹ will make Art sweat, but it ought to delight his 18th century soul to have provoked it. I hope it doesn't frighten him off from snapping at my heels again because it makes me leap higher into the air. This is the second or third skirmish we've had. I've enjoyed all of them--I hope he has too. I think "To A Lily" is the greatest satirical poem I've yet written. Between you and me, I think I've pretty well impaled the poor bugger.

I've revised the Alexander Trocchi poem. You'll see it in an early issue of the *Can Forum*, along with the two enclosed poems.² I'm now at work polishing a longish poem which I'll send along when I'm finally satisfied with it. I got a great deal of enjoyment out of seeing you and Mary again. The memory of her kisses still makes me tingle.

Love,
Irving

enclosure: ts "Whom I Write For" and "There Were No Signs," *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* 74-5, 1.

¹Irving Layton, "To a Lily," *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* 68-69.

²Layton is probably thinking of his disagreement with Smith at the Kingston Conference (see 9.5), as well as Smith's reply to Layton's letter to the editor of the *Canadian Forum* (October 1956;

380.[marginalia]  July 17, 1961

Dear Irving:

Thank you very much for your letter of July 11, and the enclosed poems. I'm not very much taken with the poem "There Were No Signs"--the whole thing is much too flat, prosaic, & hackneyed. A line like "Out of weakness, I have built strength" is not worthy of you. [I think the poem is rescuable--but it needs a lot of sharpening.] But the Smith poem is delightful--an excellent piece of light verse.

I'm not sure from your letter how long you are to be in New Hampshire, but I am taking a chance on sending this letter to that address, presuming that they will forward it if necessary. You do not explain what happened about your projected visit to Cuba. I have been imagining you and Aviva sipping rum as you watch the girls' skirts swirl up around their bronze thighs & rosy vulvas as they twirled in the sexy rhythms of the rumba and the samba--& now I must come down to earth & imagine you using an outdoor toilet in the backwoods of New Hampshire. Did Mr. Castro get wind of your Yankee Imperialist sentiments & deny you a visa, or what?

I have been fearfully busy ever since getting back from Montreal. I first of all wrote the final chapter of the new edition of Creative Writing in Canada--about forty pages of pretty close analysis of both the poetry and the fiction. I think it is good stuff, but of course I am prejudiced. Then there was the bibliography of Creative Writing to expand & revise, & that took a lot of painstaking work as such a vast quantity of criticism of Can Lit has appeared in the last ten years. I just got that finished last week, & Ryersons now have the complete revised ms--running now to almost 300 pp as against 225 pp in the original edition.

Concurrently, I have been working on the revised & enlarged edition of the Book of Canadian Stories. I am dropping five stories from the third edition--Gilbert Parker, Theodore Roberts, Leslie Gordon Barnard, W.G. Hardy, Patricia Page--& planning to add ten new ones--by Ernest Buckler, David Walker, Irving Layton, Hugh Garner, Brian Moore, Alice Munro, Henry Kreisel, Jack Ludwig, Mordecai Richler, & Alden Nowlan. I can't get Richler to answer my letters, however, so I may have to drop him. The rest have all been most cooperative. The ms has just been mailed, though I haven't quite finished writing the introduction. Of course I expect the publishers will object to some of the stories, & we shall have a period of argumentation before printing gets underway.
I'm glad you enjoyed our Montreal visit. I am sorry you were away so much of the time, but we certainly enjoyed seeing you again. I still have erotic dreams of being awakened by Aviva, a vision of loveliness in black bra & red panties, & as a bedtime story reader she is most seductive. I shall be looking forward to Phase II putting me on Cloud IX!

Love & kisses,
Des Pacey

1Leslie Gordon Barnard (1890-1961), Canadian writer of short stories (One Generation Away 1931, So Near is Grandeur 1945) and the historical romance Jancis (1935).

2W.G. Hardy (1895-1979), short story writer, radio playwright, historian, novelist and Professor of Classics at the University of Alberta; author of The Unfulfilled (1952) and From Sea Unto Sea (1960).

3P.K. Page: see 5.60.


[s.c.]: ts "Supernatural Incident at Coos County" and "A Tall Man Executes a Jig"; published as "Supernatural Event at Cedar Pond," Balls for a One-Armed Juggler 82-83 and 111-14.

381.[pc] July 17, 1961

Berlin Crisis

If Berlin were a cancer
There's bound to come war
Sooner or later;
But to me it's quite clear
It's a mere bleeding pile
In Russia's red rear.

Comrade Kruschev, though annoyed,
Won't see Russia destroyed
For a hemorrhoid;
Though he may growl and grouch,
He'll drop his rockets
And when it itches, scratch.

382. [pc]  
July 18, 1961  
Dear Desmond,  

In the 5th stanza, 9th line, still should be Yet. Please make the change. Let me know how you like the poem.\(^1\) I’m enormously pleased with it myself. I see my boy, Kennedy, is holding firm in Berlin despite the SB’s.\(^2\) Good for him. Love to Mary. 

Yours,  
Irv

\(^1\)"A Tall Man Executes a Jig."

\(^2\)Further developments in the controversy between the Soviet Union and the Western powers on the future of Berlin occurred in July of 1961; on July 17 Kennedy sent Kruschev a thirty-three point note which declared "there is no reason for a crisis over Berlin. If one develops, it is because the Soviet Union is attempting to invade the basic rights of others."

383.  
July 21, 1961  
Dear Desmond,  

Not enough money and friends who said we must be crazy to go to Cuba when the heat was on. In summer one doesn’t go outside, Max Cohen told me, who spent a roasting July two years ago. Some SB’s with a Castro-ation complex are planning a 10-day visit to the Cuban paradise this coming Xmas. One hundred per person. Maybe Aviva and I will go then. 

Aviva and I are both delighted with NH. We have a comfortable cottage beside a small lake that’s fed by a hundred underground springs. I’ve never had more refreshing swims. We’ve rented a horse for the summer and we go horseback riding every day. Or we would if my body was not so stiff and bruised after the first ride I took two days ago. We haven’t the proper clothes for horseback riding. The result is that I’ve two perfectly round sores the shape and size of a Canadian quarter on the fronts of my ankles—you might also say they look like stigmata—and a much larger denomination, my little one tells me, on my rear. I’m waiting for the stiffness to go away and the aforesaid stigmata to heal or become calloused before I take Princess out again. She’s a very playful horse, spirited and mischievous. We make a handsome pair together, the man who owns her tells me. I’m glad to hear your good work goes forward. When will Creative Writing in Canada be out? This autumn? What’s the news about your Anthology? Not the short stories, but the poems—something you mentioned to me about a year ago.\(^1\) Is that close to publication also? Well, I’m at work on my next book of poems, though I shall wait three or four years before I bring it out. I want it to contain fifty first-rate pieces, and maybe half-a-dozen short stories. Jack McClelland is arranging a reading tour for me this coming January. After it’s over, I
shall probably leave for Italy and work away at my poems & stories. By now you’ve probably received two more poems of mine, and I’m most eager to have your opinion of them. "Supernatural Incident at Coos County" is something new for me; since I’m in New Hampshire, let’s be Frostian and call it ‘a further range’. I’ve sent it to Tamarack Review. "A Tall Man Executes a Jig" has a music I’ve not achieved heretofore, plus some interesting ideas and imagery. I wasn’t quite happy with Section III, so I’m enclosing what I think is an improved version. The image of the whirling circles of sun and gnats meshing is both audacious and symbolically significant. In Section I, please change "mites" to "gnats" for I’ve since learned that that is what they are.

Yes, I’m enormously pleased with "To A Lily". When I was last in Toronto, I told John Colombo that I had lost the malice necessary to write satirical verse, in particular to reply to Smith’s squib in the Can Forum. I was most agreeably surprised to find that I was mistaken, and that when I called, the biting quatrains came. It pleases me also that you like it as much as I do. Will Milton Wilson not be put off by "cunts"—he gets terribly squeamish at times—and publish it in the Can Forum? In any case, I’ve insured the poem’s appearance by sending it along with my revised foreword to "Poems 27 cents each". That’s the book of poems put out by my last year’s students at Sir George Williams. I believe I read a rough draft of the Foreword to you and Mary when you were up [at] the house.

Well, some excellent news. Abelard-Schuman have taken Aviva’s children’s stories. They will be published simultaneously in the USA, Canada, England, Australia and New Zealand. She’s almost out of her mind with joy. The letter they sent her was full of praise and encouragement to keep on writing. Yesterday, she wrote a lively narrative poem for children called "Please Louise". She intends to have a dozen more stories before the holidays end.

Ah well, it’s a good world when there’s love and creativity, and enduring friendship.

Hugs,
Irving

enclosure: ts revised "A Tall Man Executes a Jig"

1See 319.1.


July 28, 1961

Dear Irving,

Your New Hampshire retreat sounds idyllic! When are you leaving there? My thought is that you might come home this way, & stay a day or two with us. We shall be away in PEI from August 12 to 20, but at home the rest of the time. We should be delighted to see you.

Both Creative Writing & the Stories should be out this fall. I have now had permission to reprint from all the new authors except Richler, who apparently intends to ignore me. But the others--Jack Ludwig, Brian Moore, Alice Munro, Ernest Buckler, David Walker & Alden Nowlan--all say they’ll be honoured to be included.

That poetry anthology is hanging fire. I don’t know that I shall go on with it. There is something rather futile about anthologizing. I’d like to have a go at a full dress biography of Carman--I think I might enjoy that more. I’ll probably do the poetry anthology some day, but at the moment I feel Smith has saturated the market.

I enjoyed "Supernatural Incident" very much, and "A Tall Man Executes a Jig" almost as much. They are both fine poems, though I think they could both be tightened up a little.

I suppose Wilson might put "c---ts" in the Forum!1 A few people in Canada would guess the word, don’t you think? After all, they all came out of same!

Delighted to hear the news of Aviva’s success! Great! Now I shall be able to take the book to bed with me & bring back the memory of her fingers straying underneath the bedcovers! There, that ought to start something!

Love & kisses,
Des Pacey

1The Forum declined "To a Lily:" it was published in Cataract 1.2 (winter 1962) np, with line 25 printed intact: "In the loveliest cunts I know."

385.[pc]

c/o Rasmussen
RFD #1
New Hampshire
August 8, 1961

Dear Desmond,

Will write you a long letter in a day or so. Have been knocking out poems. Wilson took "There Were No Signs" for the CF with compliments etc. And the QQ has taken "A Tall Man Executes a Jig" which I altered somewhat, and wrote an additional stanza for. As it now reads, it’s probably the best thing I’ve done this summer. Have written three or four poems besides some slighter things, which are almost as good. I’ll enclose them in letters.

Love,
Irving
386. August 10, [1961]
Dear Irving,

Your card in this morning. We leave for PEI tomorrow but shall be back on the 19th. Are you going to visit us on your way back?

Island address:
Oceanview Cottages,
Cavendish, P.E.I.
Yesterday I taped a ten minute interview on Grove for CBC Wednesday Night.¹
Now have all the permissions for the Stories & both it & CW in C are being typeset. They’re printing 5000 copies of each. Colombo now works for them—a good move I’d think.²

Am just about exhausted from overwork, heat, & marking essays—but love & kisses to you both!

Des

²John Robert Colombo worked (on a contract basis) as a senior advisory editor at McClelland & Stewart from 1963-72.

387. c/o Rasmussen
RFD #1
Berlin, NH
August 12, 1961
Dear Desmond,

Though the enclosed poems might not indicate it, this has been the most relaxed summer vacation I’ve ever had. The weather has been splendid, the thunderstorms coming at the right time, and I’ve been able to lie in the fields soaking in all the sunlight I wanted. There’s a lovely, secluded meadow I discovered on one of my rambles, and to there I betake myself after breakfast, bringing all books to read, pencils and writing paper and whatever wits and talents I have. It’s been a productive summer, too. To date I have about twenty-five poems, almost enough to fill another book—and there are still four more weeks to go! However, I shan’t publish for another two years or three. When I do I want it to be a blockbusting collection of poems and stories. I plan to write the stories in the winter; the poems in summer. So if K & K¹ spare us, look for another book from me in 1963.²

I think it’s an excellent idea of yours to write a biography of Bliss Carman. I can’t think of anyone more suited than you to give us a decent one. You have the requisite sympathy, insight and scholarly acumen to do an impressive job. For myself, I’d very much like to see you go on with it. Your essay on him was damned good—very fair, very kind. And why not do something on Lampman as well? Your interpretation of Lampman’s "Heat" is by far the most illuminating thing I’ve ever read on him.
Did I tell you Maxie was in San Francisco? I sent him right after he finished his exams—he did very well in them, too—so that he could be with Betty for the entire summer. He doesn’t write often, but from his infrequent letters, I get the idea he’s having lots of fun sowing his wild oats. I doubt whether he’s left a single virgin intact, though he hasn’t confined himself exclusively to that archaic group, for that matter. It’ll be quite a problem handling him when he comes back—if he comes back! The pickings are too easy and luscious in SF.

I’ve decided to apply for a part-time teaching job in Montreal, so that I can send Betty and Sissyboo more money. In fact, I’m mailing the application in at the same time that I’m sending this letter off to you. Did I ever tell you about The Ross Tutorial School? I taught there, way back in 1945. I think I can get two or three hours of teaching each morning. He’s got a Grade XII, which is the equivalent of the Freshman year at McGill. If I get the position, I’ll be giving the Survey course in Eng Literature and perhaps another course in Modern History. I’m rather looking forward to it. How I’ll be able to take two weeks off for the reading tour Jack McClelland is arranging for me in January, I don’t quite know; but I can leave that hanging for awhile.

Aviva & I are very grateful to you for your invitation, but I don’t think it’s feasible to take you up on it, though we’d both like to very much. I’m planning to see my brother who lives in the state of New York while Aviva is going into NYC to see her publisher about the new stories she’s written. But we love you and Mary for thinking of us.

Hugs,
Irv

1Kennedy and Kruschev; Kruschev announced on August 7 that the USSR might have to call up reservists and move troops to her western borders in reply to American threats (see 380); at 2am on August 13, East German authorities sealed the border between East and West Berlin.


3See 414.2.

4See 123.4.

5Abelard Schuman; see 383.3.
It looks as if I’ve got a teaching job for next year. It’s at the Ross Tutorial School, and I’ll be teaching Matriculation Eng Lit and History. I taught there sixteen years ago—veterans fresh from the wars. It was a great experience, and I still get letters from my former students, who are now practising doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. There’s a good possibility of there being a Freshman year also, so I’ll be giving the Survey course in Eng Lit—you know, from Beowulf to Layton.

Glad to hear your book of short stories is all wrapped up. I’m very much looking forward to reading it. Can’t understand why Richler shouldn’t have answered you. Are you sure he got your letter? He travels around quite a bit.

I think I told you I sent "A Tall Man Executes a Jig" to the QQ, and they accepted. Then I added another stanza to it, after making one or two changes in the other stanzas. Well, it’s now a poem of six stanzas—eighty-four lines—and, I think, the best poem I’ve ever written. Anyhow, it gives the best, the most poetic statement, of my outlook on life and things. I also made some changes in "For Whom I Write"—eliminated some of the crudities, and altered the tone somewhat. The enclosed poems were written during the past week. If you like them, you can put them into the Fiddlehead. All counted, I’ve written over twenty-five this summer. Together with the ones I wrote before the holidays began, I practically have another book. However, I shan’t publish until 1963—and then, well, you’ll see. Love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving

PS Aviva says she wants to read you some more bedtime stories.

enclosure: ts "For Aviva, Because I Love Her" and "Lilith,"
Balls for a One-Armed Juggler 2 & 60–61.


389. [c August 20, 1961]

This morning I finished another poem called "Baudelaire in a Summer Cottage." One of the very best. I’m mailing it off to Weaver.

There are still "Supernatural Event" and several more longish pieces. This has been a marvellous summer. Still 10 days to go. Aviva also writing like mad.

Hugs,
Irv

PS "A Tall Man" finally wrote itself into 6 stanzas.
Malcolm Ross and QQ very happy with it. So am I. Wilson has taken, with fervor, "Whom I Write For" as well as "There

1Irving Layton, "Baudelaire in a Summer Cottage," Balls for a One—Armed Juggler 42-43.

2See 379.3.


390. August 23, 1961

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your card of August 8, letters of August 12 and 20, and the enclosed poems.

I envy you the relaxed summer you are having. As you say, my week on PEI was all too brief and I have come back rather more tense & harried than I went.

The holiday itself was lovely, but I was just beginning to unwind when it was over. We had a cottage fifty yards from the beach & ocean, and were within a quarter of a mile of a tennis court. Our daily routine was to have a family set of tennis first, then go for a swim in the ocean, have lunch, then go blueberry picking, fishing, or hiking in the early afternoon, have another swim in the late afternoon, have supper, and then play tennis until dark.

The reason we had to come back so soon was that my two oldest children have jobs from which they could not get more than a week’s leave: Philip is a reporter on the local daily, & Mary Ann is a playground supervisor. I have lots to do too for that matter—graduate theses to read, oral exams to conduct, & my chapter of the Literary History to write.

I think your new poems are all very powerful things, & we are glad to accept "For Aviva" & "Lilith" for the Fiddlehead. The latter I like especially much.

I hope that you enjoy your teaching at the Ross Tutorial School. That’s the outfit run by Fred Ross’s mother, isn’t it? One of our professors here, Tom McFeat, told me that he was a student of yours at that school after the War.

We are very disappointed that you & Aviva will not be visiting us here on your way back to Montreal. That would have given us something very pleasant to look forward to.

Mary did some lovely pastels on her Island holiday, but deliberately did not take her oils along in order to have
more time with the family. She did a few oils earlier in
the summer, one especially good one of the campus that has
real magic about it.

Did I forget to tell you that I did finally hear from
Richler? Weaver gave me his London address, & I wrote to
him there & had a prompt & friendly reply. He never got my
first letter.

And did I tell you about the tape I made for CBC
Wednesday Night on Frederick Philip Grove? I don't know
when the actual broadcast is to occur, but I gather in
September.

And did I tell you that Mason Wade was here for a week
& that he was very surprised to hear you were living so
close to his New Hampshire home?

Last night we were out to a party for Betty Brewster,
who is here on holiday.

Alden Nowlan has finished his novel & Fred Cogswell is
reading it at the moment. Nowlan has turned out some
excellent short stories recently—he's a real comer, that
boy.

This Saturday we go to St. Andrew's to the wedding of
two of my former honour students, one of whom has just
returned from Oxford where he was a Rhodes Scholar. I am to
propose the toast to the bride, whose name is Kathy Hart, &
I shall end with this parody of Sidney’s "Song"

Ron Manzer has his Hart, and I have mine,
May her love her well, as I've loved my wife,
I hold his dear, and gladly drink this wine
To her sweet beauty and their wedded life.

And did I tell you that, all being well, I shall at
least be passing through Montreal twice this fall? On
November 3 I am to be in Toronto for a dinner in honour of
Vincent Massey given by the sixteen Massey fellows, of
whom the first was Lester Pearson (1923) and the last
Desmond Pacey (1938). Then on Nov. 10-14 I am to be in
Ottawa for a conference of Canadian Universities, at which I
have been asked to open the discussion on graduate work in
the humanities & social sciences.

I'd love to hear more of Aviva's bedtime stories! I've
never heard a bedtime story that was at once so soothing &
so arousing, that paradoxically made you lie down & rise up
at the same time!

Love & kisses,
Des Pacey

1Fredericton’s daily newspaper was published as the York Gleaner (1881-4), The Gleaner
(1884-9), and The Daily Gleaner (1889-present).

2Fred Ross (b. 1927), Saint John artist know for his figure studies in oil and drawings; he
exhibited in the first, fourth, and fifth Biennials of Canadian Painting.

3Tom McPeat, Professor at the University of New Brunswick.
4Alden Nowlan, *The Wanton Troopers* (Fredericton: Goose Lane, 1988). (Rejected by the one publisher Nowlan submitted the manuscript to in 1961, the novel was published posthumously.)

5Ronald Manzer (b. 1937), Professor of Political Science, University of Toronto, 1965–present; author of *Teachers and Politics* (1970), *Canada: a Socio-Political Report* (1974), and co-editor of the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*; and Kathryn (Hart) Manzer (b. 1938).

6Vincent Massey (1887–1967), politician, diplomat and Canada's first native-born Governor General (1952–9), and Head of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, which led to the formation of the Canada Council.

7Bissell’s biography is enlightening on this point:

He [Vincent Massey] had established his own system of post-graduate scholarships by diverting money, originally given by his grandfather to a Methodist university in Washington DC for graduates of the University of Toronto wishing to study abroad. The Massey scholarships, as they were called, were a good deal leaner than the Rhodes—the annual stipend for two years was a thousand dollars—but they attracted strong candidates, often men...who had missed the Rhodes...this was the golden age for Canadian post-graduate work in Britain, and over the years all but two of the Massey scholars studied at Oxford or Cambridge.


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391.[pc] c/o Rasmussen
RFD #1,
Berlin, NH
Saturday [August 26, 1961pm]

Dear Dessy-Wessy,

After your latest letter, Irving said to me in a not-so-joking voice: "What the hell did happen that night anyway!" I think from now on we’d better keep our "leetle adventure" to ourselves. I’ve caught him looking at me rather strangely!

When did you say you were going to be in Montreal again, by the way? I’ve eight new stories!

Conspiratorially yours,
Aviva xxx

392.

August 28, 1961

Dear Desmond,

Another couple of days and we’ll be back home. Sir George Williams have asked me to take on another course—Modern European Literature—so it looks as if I’m going to have a very full year of it. Altogether I shall be putting in per week about twenty-five hours of teaching. I get older but the burdens don’t decrease. Still, I always work better under pressure, and I’ve the constitution of an ox—and no nerves!

It means I’ll be able to send Betty and Sissyboo more money, and to put something away towards my children’s education. Also, Aviva is clamoring for a bambino. I’m rather curious myself to see what she and I can produce. When Maxie goes to college two years from now, I think we’ll
have the monster. It ought to be good for a couple of poems!


Aviva enjoyed your note and keeps chuckling mysteriously over it. She has about ten new bedtime stories to read you, so let us know when you're coming our way.

Will it be possible to spend the night with us?

I received a postcard from Cohen.\footnote{Leonard Cohen, letter to Irving Layton, 20 August 1961, Layton Papers, Concordia University.} He's on his island, and he raves about seeing corpses in the sea and about the "assassins' drugs".\footnote{Cohen may be simply raving, or he may be alluding to hashish, referred to in the Middle East as "the assassins' drug."} From which I gather the Greek wines are too strong for him! He's working on a re-write of his novel for Abelard-Schuman; perhaps he'll be back here for its launching whenever that takes place.

Did you hear Phyllis Webb's review of \textit{The Swinging Flesh}? Poor thing, I ruffle all her lovely feathers. But I wish to hell people would not reduce me to their own superficialities and obsessions. And did you know that "I Know The Dark And Hovering Moth" along with "The Wooden Spoon" were the two worst poems ever written? May I always write so badly! But why didn't she quote from them?

Can \textit{The Fiddlehead} use the enclosed poems? I'm glad you liked the others.

Well, now for a swim. I've been writing all day.

Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

enclosure: ts "The Gods Speak Out" and "The Hag"

\footnote{Phyllis Webb, rev. of \textit{The Swinging Flesh} by Irving Layton, \textit{Critically Speaking}, CBC Radio, 30 July 1961.} These poems did not appear in \textit{The Fiddlehead}.\footnote{These poems did not appear in \textit{The Fiddlehead}.}
September 1, 1961

[Dear Desmond],

Before not too long you will see photos of Castro and Kennedy on the steps of the White House.

Cuba definitely does not want to swing into the Soviet orbit; it is a Latin-American nation, and its destiny is tied to the USA. Not Russia. Cuban leaders now seem to have realized this, judging from Guevera's performance at the Alliance for Progress meeting of the Latin-American countries.2

I repeat: Cuba's totalitarian Communism and its separation from and hostility to the USA is a tragic mistake.

At last, we are getting the kind of forceful, intelligent, and resolute leadership from Washington (Capitalistic America to the Socialist Blabbermouths) that I've been praying for these past ten or fifteen years. For the first time, the West has the Russians off-balance, having compelled the Soviets to drop their disguise as a "peace-loving", "democracy-loving" country. Who will ever forget the pictures of the concrete wall and barbed wire in East Berlin?3 An admission that the only way to keep people in the Socialistic paradise is by naked force. What happens to the hypocritical Soviet propaganda about "self-determination", "People's Democracy" etc? Exposed, my friend. Exposed for what it is—a rotten, hypocritical lie. True, the Russians got what they wanted: they closed the border and stopped the hemorrhaging. But they have been made to pay a heavy price by the Kennedy Administration and have taken a terrific propaganda shellacking. Had it not been for Kennedy and his present team, the Russians would probably have scored a devastating moral, political, and psychological victory over the West.

As for the Soviets beginning to test their Hydrogen Bombs—well, at this stage, they're beginning to reel. They now know what they're up against, no schmo like Eisenhower—but JFK.

[Irving]

1Ernesto ("Che") Guevera (1928-67), Argentine-born chief lieutenant to Fidel Castro, assassinated in 1967.

2Kennedy promised Latin America $1 billion in US economic aid during the first year of his Alliance for Progress program on August 5 at the opening session of the Inter-American Economic and Social Conference in Uruguay. In an address on August 8, Cuban delegation head Che Guevera declared that Cuba would promise not to "export revolution" if Cuba received a pledge of "non-intervention to go ahead with our work."

3The Berlin Wall was erected in August 1961 to curtail the stream of refugees from Soviet-controlled East Berlin in the German Democratic Republic to West Berlin in the German Federal Republic; the Wall came down in November, 1989.

4The government of the USSR announced on August 31 that it had decided to resume test explosions of nuclear weapons.
September 5, 1961

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your most recent batch of poems & notes scribbled thereon.

"Memo to Contemporary Poets" is a neat squib—but it’s been done before (by Pratt\(^1\) & L.A. Mackay\(^2\) among others) & I’m not sure that it’s worth doing anyway. Like Sandburg, you are in some danger of confusing might with right.\(^3\) Perhaps in the present state of affairs ducking & shivering is the only proper stance for a man of sensibility. Swashbuckling (of the right or of the left) is the greatest danger.

"The New Man" is too obvious & prosaic a statement in its present form. A poem might be made of it, but hasn’t as yet. It almost becomes a poem in the last few lines. "Gifts" is all right—but very slight. Your wit is not sharp enough here: a poem of this kind should be sharp & thin as a razor-blade, & yours is more like a rusty pocket knife.

"Mysteries" is sheer junk. What it says is worthless, & it says it in a dull way. You can do better than this. Well, put all that in your pipe & smoke it, you arrogant bastard!

Just as I was writing this ill-natured diatribe, your very nice letter (and much better poems) of August 29 came in. Forgive me!

Delighted to get this latest letter & get the good news about your teaching programme & the bambino! My God, what a prodigy that should be—though to paraphrase GBS, what if the little beggar inherited Aviva’s figure & your face?\(^4\)

The Grove thing is to be on in October—the exact date I don’t know. It is one of the series of "profiles" on CBC Wednesday Night that month.

I heard Phyllis Webb’s review. I think you hurt her when you pulled her twat in that "For Phyllis Who..." poem!\(^5\)

Love & tickles to Aviva!

Love,
Des Pacey

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\(^{2}\) L.A. Mackay (1901-), Canadian poet, author of *Viper’s Bugloss* (1938), and *The Ill-Tempered Lover and Other Poems*.


\(^{3}\) Carl Sandburg (1878-1967), American poet and biographer whose verse was frequently criticized for its propagandistic overtones and declamatory muscularity.

\(^{4}\) Pacey refers to:

that celebrated anecdote so often repeated about the dramatist and Isadora. According to this anecdote, Isadora, at a time when her figure was considered by sculptors and artists to be one of the most graceful in the world, wrote to Shaw asking him if he would consent to have a child by her. She was supposed to have said—"You have the greatest brain in the world, I have the most graceful body."
Let us then, produce the perfect child.' To which Shaw is said to have replied:
'But what if the child turned out to have my body and your brain?' Actually, said
Shaw, it was not Isadora who made that proposition to me. The story has been told
about me in connexion with several famous women, particularly Isadora Duncan. But
I really received the strange offer from a foreign actress whose name you wouldn't
know, and which I've forgotten. But I did make that reply.

Sewell Stokes, *Near the Lions Roar* in Shaw: Interviews and Recollections ed. A.M. Gibbs (Iowa City:
U of Iowa P, 1990) 418–19. (Shaw makes a similar witticism in his early novel Cashel Byron's
Profession (London: Constable, 1901).

395. September 8, 1961

Dear Desmond,

I'd be an "arrogant bastard" if I thought that every
squib I sent you was a masterpiece. But it's not I who
think so, but you, apparently, who then proceed to demolish
them as if they were soaring giants in your path, and you a
famed killer. I send you those things, not because I
think they're great shakes, but out of a sense of fun, and
because they give in a sentence or two my feelings about
contemporary politics. If you continue to regard every
product of my pen [as] an attempted masterpiece (very
flattering to me, I'm sure) I'll have to consign them to my
wastepaper basket whose complete receptivity to my work is
now beyond all question.

Who's swashbuckling? There you go again! If firmness
in the defense of democracy and freedom is going to be
equated by you and other timorous souls with rocket-
brandishing, I'm truly afraid our cause is lost. Our
spiritual decay is deeper than I feared. Maybe the Russian
view of man is correct after all--men, they hold, are a
bundle of reflexes conditioned largely by the material
environment or interests. They're incapable of rational
thought, and any appeal to their reason or humanity is a
waste of time. Scare the living daylights out of them
(witness K's recent antics--he'd blow up the Acropolis if
necessary) but don't try to reason with them. However, if
their view is the correct one, and the new world that's
coming into being must be built upon it, then I'd rather see
myself, my children, and the rest of mankind completely
annihilated, and not a human arm or eye remain to tell our
story. I mean that.

Smith was in town. We had a lively get-together at
Frank's home. I read several of my new poems, and Art
endeared himself to me for all time by sobbing openly when I
read my revised version of "Whom I Write For." Did I tell
you that Wilson was also similarly impressed with it? He's
running it in next month's issue of the Can Forum, along
with "There Were No Signs" and "For Alexander Trocchi,
Novelist." I've added another stanza to "A Tall Man
Executes A Jig", bringing the total to seven, and ninety-
eight lines. I think it's the best poem I've yet written,
and had I done nothing else this summer but write that, I’d still feel it was a very good summer indeed.

What do you think? Now that I’ve gotten a neat position in Ross’s Tutorial High School, Sir George Williams has added another course called "Literature And The Modern World." My total teaching load will be twenty-four hrs per week, and that’s apart from all the paperwork that goes with it. I doubt whether I’ll be able to get much writing done during the next six or seven months, but I’m going to try for a couple of short stories anyhow.

Luckily I had a quiet, productive summer, and feel as fit as the proverbial fiddle--in fact, fitter. To suit my present reputation as the doyen of Can poetry, I’ve grown a chin-beard, which by elongating my face has conferred a striking dignity upon it. Women can’t keep their eyes away from it, nor their hands and lips either. In brief, it’s a great triumph, an indubitable hirsute masterpiece, drawing amorous glances from the female and awe and respect from the male. Your own face is not so hopelessly irredeemable that a chin-muff might not do something for it. Why not give it a try? It might be the most successful thing you ever did.

Maxie got back safe and full of sound from San Francisco. He had a great time there, and he brought me welcome news about my daughter, Naomi. He says she’s grown into a lively and beautiful girl, very self-reliant and independent. She’s also a great reader. Betty has done some painting, and Max says she plans to eventually settle in New York. I’d like that, since I’d be able to see my daughter. Well, excuse these family details. It must be the Hebrew in me. All my love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving

396. Dept of English
UNB
September 26, 1961

Dear Irving,

I keep hoping to get a letter from you, but day after day there is nothing. Of course I know I owe you a letter, but I have been so fearfully busy with the opening of the new term that I haven’t had a free moment. Perhaps you are likewise busy.

I passed on your two poems to Cogswell, & he will use "The Gods Speak Out" in Fiddlehead. I enclose the other, "The Hag", which he didn’t like.1

Your letter of September 8 was a good one--full of high spirits & the news about your beard. It must be very

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1On September 2, Kruschev sent the United States, France and Britain a note accusing them of turning Berlin into a "base for sabotage, espionage, and speculative and other subversive activities" and warned that they would "bear full responsibility" for the consequences if the alleged "provocations" continued.
ticklish for Aviva. Does she enjoyed being tickled? If so, I’ll try to grow one too!

Life has been so absolutely hectic since I last wrote to you that I haven’t had a moment to myself. I lost my secretary, & have been trying to break in two new ones--& that has destroyed my routine. There is a vast mass of routine correspondence, application forms, registration cards, course records etc in connection with the Graduate School, & once your secretary fails to cope with this, everything starts to go haywire. I’ve been just about frantic trying to make up for the new girls’ mistakes.

We also are very busy with a number of visiting firemen2 whom Lord Beaverbrook has brought here--Krishna Menon3 of India, Sir John Rothenstein of the Tate Gallery,4 AJP Taylor of Magdalen, Oxford5--all of whom must be wined & dined & shown around etc, etc.

You’ll be interested to know that both Raymond Souster & Louis Dudek are to read their poetry here this winter--Souster in January6 & Dudek in February.7

I’m toying with the idea of applying for a Canada Council Fellowship for next year. God knows I need a change & a rest.

Mary has been learning to drive the car, & has her test on Thursday. She is in great spirits, & has had a new hairdo that makes her look about twenty-one.

I don’t know when I’ll get leisure to write anything. I have so many things to do this fall, including a speech at St Stephen this Friday evening (Canadian Club), a dinner for Vincent Massey in Toronto on Nov 3, a speech in Ottawa on Nov 14 etc etc.8

Do write soon & cheer me up. I’m not exactly depressed, but I’m certainly overburdened.

Love & kisses (for Aviva, I wouldn’t kiss your hairy face!)

As ever,
Des Pacey

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1See 392: enclosure.

2Outside troubleshooters invited by an institution or corporation to help solve problems or potential problems; "One hundred years ago, it was customary to wine and dine visiting companies of volunteer firemen." American Speech 28 (May 1953): 91.


4Sir John Rothenstein (b. 1901), art critic well-known for his studies of Manet and Turner; director and keeper of the Tate Gallery, London, 1938-64.

5A.J.P. Taylor (1906-90), British historian, research fellow at Magdalen College in Oxford, author of a biography of his friend Lord Beaverbrook (1972) and The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848-1918 (1954).
October 5, 1961

Dear Desmond,

I wish you'd be consistent.1 You say you admire Yeats' "Lapis Lazuli", because it affirms gayety even in the midst of civilizations going smash—"Old civilizations put to the sword/Then they and this wisdom went to rack"—but when I say pretty much the same thing in my "Foreword" I'm told, or my readers are, that I'm trying to "extract some grim amusement from the spectacle of civilization in flames." What's the difference between "gayety" and "grim amusement"? And why is the one acceptable and considered "great art", while the other is rejected out of hand like a belch at a funeral service? Anyhow will you photograph the marvellous instrument—for you must have one—that allows you to distinguish so precisely between the acceptable "gayety" of the one and the reprehensible "grim amusement" of the other and send me a reproduction. I'd like to show it around as well as have a look at [it] myself.

Believe me, I'm smiling, not at all angry. The review is, well—asinine—as I told you when you first sent me a draft of it. It's not for my sake that I shouted so loudly, but for your own. If you wish to say I've lost my sense of direction, go ahead and do so, if only for the pleasure it must give you to say it. The truth, of course, is otherwise. I was never more certain of my certainties than I am today; though like any civilized non-Canadian (in the cultural sense) I dislike polyanna masquerading as courage and high spirits. My diurnal cheerfulness is something I win, not something I have thrust into my mouth while I keep my eyes shut. And what sense does it make to say a man "is losing his Marxism", as you say I have lost mine? Is Marxism some kind of object—an inkwell, a whiskey flask—that one loses or has removed from him like a wallet, Time being the pickpocket? I repeat, I'm as much a Marxist as I ever was, my outlook on society and history having to a large extent been shaped by Marx's economic and historical views. If you attended any of my present lectures in Modern History, you'd see how completely untrue your statement is. Of course, one trouble lies here: like the majority of Canadians you're too unsophisticated to be able to distinguish between Marxism and Communism, confusing the two, and since you're too damned lazy to read up on the subject, you choose rather to make me the victim of your own lazy ignorance. Well, that's life for you! As for losing my faith in sex and poetry: man, you're crazy. You simply don't know what you're talking about. Again, were you here...! Didn't you say you'd never been unfaithful, not
even once, in all your married life? Now, that argues a singular lack of imagination and adventurousness: anyway, it does not give you the right to talk so big and free on the subject of sex, does it? Or maybe it does, just that being the thing that distinguishes the talkers from the doers.

Maybe we’ll straighten everything out when you come here—is it next month? Though what’s the use: I’ve told you all these things before, orally and in writing. You must have your own reasons for wanting to believe things that are palpably untrue. I contradict you, firstly, because I find it amusing to tweak your nose, and secondly, because I want to keep the record clear. What will all the hot-pants virgins and masturbatory, pimpily-faced Canadians think if they’re told by someone like yourself that Layton has lost his faith in sex? Do you want to start an epidemic of suicides? At this point, I’m a crutch to the Canadian psyche. Heaven knows, it needs something like me; and it’s largely my patriotism that makes me demur when you make your dangerous accusations. At this point to say I’m not for sex, is a damnable heresy! I ought to order you to be shot with five squirts of cunt-juice.

I’m enclosing an excerpt from today’s Montreal Star. However, you’ve probably read the news in your own local paper. I’m referring to Gaitskell’s recent victory over the unilateralists and other assorted socialist blabbermouths. You’ll also notice—for I’ve taken the trouble to underline it—that Gaitskell approves of the Kennedy Administration. Now, own up, Desmond: I said all these things that are now becoming plain to most sensible people, when your teeth were chattering, not to mention the undignified noises I heard in other quarters. When I want a good laugh, I haul out some of your letters, those in which you warn me darkly and solemnly against Kennedy’s millionaire background. Do you still feel so jittery about him? It was evident to me months ago that President Kennedy would follow the liberal course he has pursued, despite the gloomy croakings and prognostications of his socialistic critics. Gaitskell owes his triumph over the unilateralists and ban-the-bombers almost entirely to the Kennedy Administration and to the fine and inspiring leadership it has provided the West during the past several critical months. Gaitskell’s "socialism" makes sense. He has tossed out of the window—as I recommended all along: consult my letters to you; I am voluminous on the subject—the wacky doctrinairism that has so largely paralyzed the movement and reduced it to impotence. What I want to see, what I’ve asked for all along, is a pragmatic but militant democracy. Only such a democracy can offer an alternative faith to Communism. And at last—may the merciful gods who listen to the pleas of a poet be thanked—I seem to be getting what I want.

You’re working too hard, Desmond. I don’t know anyone who drives himself as much as you do—not even I. I think it would be splendid if you got a Canada Council Fellowship and took a year off from all your duties. You need to loaf
and invite your soul\textsuperscript{5} and to get rid of all your matrimonial repressions. Go to Mallorca and live like a beachcomber. Or come to Montreal, grow a beard, and fit yourself up with a studio where you can entertain all the frustrated married women who are looking for an intellectual lay, very sympathisch,\textsuperscript{6} very understanding. Leonard Cohen could probably show you the ropes, and I can help by reading you my latest sex poems by way of an aphrodisiac. Come, the world waits for you with slender open legs. You're not too old to learn.

A chaste kiss for Mary. Aviva is not here, but I know she'd want to be remembered to you.

Hugs,
Irving

enclosure: ts "foreword" to Poems for 27 Cents

\textsuperscript{1}Layton is responding to Pacey's review of The Swinging Flesh and The Laughing Storm in The Fiddlehead 49 (summer 1961) 61-62; see 370.

\textsuperscript{2}W.B. Yeats, "Lapis Lazuli;" see 346.6 (Layton quotes lines 27-8).


\textsuperscript{4}Hugh Gaitskell, leader of the British Labour Party, was successful over the left-wing of his Party who favoured a unilateralist renunciation of nuclear strategy and withdrawal from the NATO alliance.

\textsuperscript{5}See 247.1.

\textsuperscript{6}Yiddish: likeable.
Dear Irving & Aviva,

Just a hasty note to say that I was thrilled by your "foreword" to Poems for 27 Cents, tickled pink by Aviva's kiss imprinted on the envelope, and stimulated by your good argumentative letter—but, I am deep in the preparation of the index for the new edition of Creative Writing & can't take time to write a decent letter. I love you both & my friendship with you is one of the brightest spots in my life.

I expect to be passing through Montreal on November 3 and again on November 15 but I'll let you know the details later.

Love & kisses,
Des P

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Dear Irving,

This will have to be another short note. I just finished reading the page proofs & preparing the index of Creative Writing in Canada this afternoon—and already the galley proofs of the Book of Canadian Stories have arrived for reading! Incidentally, the publishers say that all the rights have been cleared for the new stories except yours. We're paying $50 a story. Do you know what the hold-up is on yours? Perhaps you should query Jack McClelland.

Re that review—I was of course having fun tweaking your nose a bit in public. What I say about you in the new edition of Creative Writing¹ will more than make up for it. But you really heaped coals of fire on my head with that handsome tribute in Poems for 27 Cents.² The nicest compliment I've ever been paid.

Give my love to Aviva. Is she as beautiful and as amorous as ever? More so, I'm sure.

Love,
Dessie

¹See 376.2.

²Pacey refers to the final paragraph of Layton's Introduction:

The only critic in this country who has insisted that poetry should be made out of life, not worn-out mythologies, who has praised vigour and passion above sterile correctness, and who has consistently expressed a viewpoint opposed to that of the Frye-Smith Axis, has been Desmond Pacey. Whenever I become too strident in my denunciation of professors I am pulled up short by my remembering that Dr. Pacey is one of them. Here is one, however, who has not confused art with scholarship, ecstasy with analysis, inspiration with erudition. To keep the record clear, it must be said that Pacey was the first and almost the only champion of the kind of poetry written by Dudek, Souster, myself, and now continued by Milton Acorn, Henry Moscovitch and the poets appearing in the present book. I therefore salute him and dedicate this book to him with affection and gratitude.

Dear Desmond,

I'd have answered your letters sooner than this, but I waited for the enclosed--my part of it, that is--to appear. My letter to the editor appeared today. About half-an-hour ago, an acquaintance phoned up to ask me if I really thought myself a genius. I anticipate a hundred more such calls before the evening is over. Well, well, in the long run we are all accepted at our own evaluation; anyway what's the harm? Give the yahoos and the desiccated culturati (my own word) something to yak away about. All such questions are finally settled by our great-great-grandchildren: Behind all the blague, believe me, quite level-headed and your very humble friend.

Poems for 27 Cents has been selling like lemonade in the middle of July. I'm told there are only about fifty copies remaining. Some of the poets are thinking of bringing out a second and larger edition, and it might be done. Without my knowledge the poems of a certain Nicky Teller were left out--the group thought his stuff too raw. Actually, for my money, his poems were [the] liveliest, and I had them largely in mind when I wrote my "Foreword". As if to prove my statement that only two or three in this country know what poetry is all about--I guess that's why they turned thumbs down on him! Ah, well. I think Nicky said something to me once about being a student of yours at the U of NB. Do you remember him? He'll never become a poet, but those things of his had a passion and freshness that appealed to me very much. Certainly if there's a revised edition I'll see to it that his poems get in.

My teaching is keeping me on the go this year. I've very little time to myself, keep shuttling from one place to the other. On Fridays, for instance, I give a lecture at Sir George Williams in the morning, then dash up to the High School for three hours of uninterrupted teaching in the afternoon, and am back again at the University at 6:30 pm for a two-hour session. On Thursdays it's almost insane. My best day is Tuesday when I only teach at the High School mornings. Nevertheless, I have several projects rattling about in my brain, one of them, a book consisting of letters, poems, and a Dominion Day address I gave on the CBC to be published under the title Mein Humphm."

Are you all through indexing? That must be some chore. I suppose the book will appear around Xmas. I'm of course damned curious to find out what you're written about me and whether it'll set me roaring again. Don't for a moment think I was nettled by your review of The SF. I wasn't, not really. Given my outlook on the world and the absurd creatures in it, I can only get up so much earnestness, then it spills into laughter. And the most absurd creature in it, I know, is simply myself. I didn't write the paragraph merely to compliment you, but to tell a truth. Among the pedants and deadbeats, you stand out like a rampaging lion. Even today, you're the only one with the guts and
perspicacity to say that the mythopoeia of Frye is myopia. And Smith with his pretentious nonsense about eclecticism. Why do they go on writing such balderdash?

Aviva says she’s dying to read you some more bedtime stories. Yes, she’s looking exceptionally well just now. Her principal has asked her to act as his stand-in as Extension Lecturer at McGill. She’s already given one lecture and next week she’ll be giving her second. Of course, she’s all puffed out and goes about muttering about there being Universities and universities. Yes, she quite looks down on me these days. But I reverse matters at night. My love to Mary. When are you coming to Montreal?

Love,
Irving


1 See enclosure.

2 French: tall tale, hoax, joke.

3 Nicolas Teller (b. 1937), received his Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of New Brunswick in 1958.

4 See 315.9; unpublished.

5 Layton refers to Smith’s closing remarks in his "Introduction" to the Oxford Book of Canadian Verse (see 325.22): But the Canadian poet has one advantage—an advantage that derives from his position of separateness and semi-isolation. He can draw upon French, British, and American sources in language and literary convention; at the same time he enjoys a measure of detachment that enables him to select and adapt what is relevant and useful. This gives to contemporary Canadian poetry in either language a distinctive quality—its eclectic detachment. This can be, and has been, a defect of timidity and mediocrity; but it can also be, as it is hoped this book will show, a virtue of intelligence and discrimination. (li)

401. October 30, 1961

Dear Irving,

I have just discovered that the new train schedules allow me virtually no stopover in Montreal this weekend. This coming Friday morning I am due to reach Windsor Station at 9, & to leave Central for Toronto at 9:15—so the railway advises me to get off at Montreal West & transfer to Lachine to make sure of the connection. Coming back Monday evening I have to go through the same procedure in reverse. So I guess we shall have to wait until the following weekend for our chat.

Thank you for your letter of October 25, & for the enclosed clippings. I am to review Callaghan’s new novel
for Queen’s Quarterly,¹ but I haven’t yet received the book. Judging from the reviews of it I have read, I don’t think I shall like it much. I’m afraid Callaghan has developed an exaggerated idea of his own importance—as you should know, this is not unusual among Canadian writers!!

I’m delighted to know that Poems for 27 Cents is selling so well. If you get any reviews of the book, will you lend them to me? I remember Nick Teller very well—he wrote one poem I liked very much, about a piece of pink ribbon.² He’s a very bright lad indeed—and quite a ladies’ man!

It sounds as if you are even busier than I am. I have finished the page proofs & the index of Creative Writing, and the galley proofs of the Stories. I believe the Press hopes to have both books out by the end of November.

I am sending you, on loan, for immediate return, that part of the manuscript of CW in C which deals with you. That will slake your curiosity. How do you like it?

So Aviva is now a stand-in at McGill? I’d say she’d be more appropriately termed a lie-in or a lay-in!!

I don’t suppose you have room for Mary & I to sleep on the night of Nov 11, do you? Of course it would be fun to sleep four in a bed, but hardly dignified! We certainly shan’t be able to afford the Ritz this time—but perhaps we can find a cheap room somewhere.

Love & kisses,
Des P

enclosure: section from Creative Writing in Canada (revised edition: page proofs)

¹Desmond Pacey, rev. of A Passion in Rome by Morley Callaghan Queen’s Quarterly lxxx (Feb. 1962): 308-10.

had had enough. So I’ve been asked to address the students on "The Role of the Writer in Canada."¹ The Sir George Williams University Philosophical Society wants me to speak on "The Ethical Implications of Free Love."² I didn’t know there were any.

We’d be delighted to put you and Mary up anytime—a real and wonderful pleasure.

Hugs,
Irv

time for preparation, etc. As for the High School--don't ask!

Aviva has gone off to work. She's still mystified by the silence that followed after you heard her voice last night. You'll have to clear up the mystery for her when you come. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

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1An Orthodox Jewish school of higher instruction in Jewish learning, chiefly for students preparing to enter the rabbinate.


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Dear Irving,

Thank you for your note of last Thursday, & for your telephone call this Tuesday evening.

I am delighted that you were pleased by the section about your work in the new edition of *CW in C*. If there are no worse goofs than leaving out the "A" before "Red" (& even that may have been changed in the proofs) I shall be happy.

I am, on the other hand, terribly sorry to have caused you all that trouble in trying to meet me in Montreal. Knowing how busy you are, I really didn’t expect you’d be able to meet me, so I didn’t look for you as thoroughly as I might. When I got to Central at 6 o’clock, I circled that big lobby 2 or 3 times, & then took a taxi for Windsor. So sorry!

Now about this Saturday. Don’t spoil your plans for the evening on our account. It’s impossible to say just when we shall arrive, & we have Philip1 & other people whom we can see, so just ignore us. Leave the key under the mat, as you suggested, & if you’re not there we’ll just make ourselves at home.

Love,
Des

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1Philip Pacey was doing his undergraduate degree at McGill.

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Dear Irving & Aviva,

I am sorry to have been so slow in writing to thank you for your wonderful hospitality during our recent visit to Montreal. You gave us a perfectly scrumptious time, and every moment of our stay was a sheer delight. The only reason for the delay in saying so is that both Mary & I have been fearfully busy since getting back: my desk was piled high with unanswered letters, unopened memoranda, unmarked essays, & unforeseen emergency communications. Mary’s pile was of dirty clothes, unstocked cupboards etc etc—though
the two bigger girls had done wonders in getting the meals, making the beds etc.

We were very late getting home last Thursday night—in fact it was 1 o’clock Friday morning when we pulled into our driveway. There were two reasons for this: (a) a three-hour stopover in Quebec city and (b) an hour’s delay with car trouble in Rivière du Loup.

The stopover in Quebec city was a deliberate & pleasant one. Mary had an idea that a travelling exhibition of French paintings of the 17th & 18th Centuries was to open in Quebec that day¹, so we decided to have our lunch there & try to locate the paintings. We had a very good lunch (complete with a bottle of wine) in "Le Vendôme" near the Château Frontenac, & then tracked down the paintings, which were in the Provincial Museum on the Plains of Abraham. The exhibition was not scheduled to open until that evening, but when we told them we were from New Brunswick the curators allowed us to have a special sneak preview. The paintings were very interesting indeed, particularly those by Claude.

Near Rivière du Loup the car started to act queerly—as if it were not getting enough gas. We stopped at the Ford Garage, & they tinkered with the distributor for an hour or so—after which time it ran perfectly again. But it was seven o’clock before we got away from Riviere du Loup—and we still had 255 miles to go! However the rest of the trip was uneventful.

There is not much news—I have been too busy to do anything except try to cope with the mass of work that accumulated during my absence. You’ll be glad to know that I managed to call the joint Ryerson-Macmillan bluff about the High School Anthology: I said I would drop the whole scheme unless they allowed the book to stand much as I had planned it & gave me a firm contract with an exact publication date & a generous advance on royalties. They have agreed to my demands.²

Mary & I brought home from Ottawa the love letters we exchanged during the year I was alone in Cambridge, 1938-1939. They make very stimulating bed-time reading. They certainly couldn’t be published during our life-times (we’d die of shame) but I think they’d become a classic of their kind if they were published a century hence.³ I thought I should find them maudlin, but they glow with sincerity and candid passion. I believe my letters to her were by far the best things I ever wrote, & Mary’s letters are I believe the most frank & honest expressions of feminine desire that I have ever read. What do you think we should do—burn them, or deposit them in the library for opening in 2050 AD?

But before I come to the end of this letter I do want to say again how much we appreciated your kindness. You made us feel perfectly at home; your bed is beautifully comfortable; Aviva’s meals were absolute triumphs of the culinary art; the night clubs were stimulating in every respect; the movie was about the most memorable one we have ever seen. Thanks for everything!
I see Dudek is sniping at you, Cohen etc in Delta.⁴ The review sounded to me suspiciously like sour grapes. And you let him have a broadside in your McGill speech! All I can say is that I hope you never decide to attack me. I find the whole situation rather sad: you & Louis were once such friends, & achieved so much as a team. Isn’t some kind of rapprochement still possible?

All the best,
Des Pacey

¹Heritage de France: eighty-seven French paintings from the 17th and 18th Centuries, La Musée de la Province, Quebec, 16 Nov.-16 Dec. 1961.

²Desmond Pacey, ed. Our Literary Heritage; see 319.1.

³These letters remain in the possession of Mary Pacey.


December 2, 1961
Dear Desmond,
This has been one helluva week. Examination time. Mountains of paper with illegible handwriting on them piled mountain-high on my desk. I feel as if a hundred thousand children had pissed black ink on me. One of these nights I’ll dream of myself drowning in a lake made by this furious pissing. Then, I’ve had to [in]vigilate all week, which for a man of my restless temperament is very hard to take. On top of all these calamities, this week I gave a talk on "The Antinomies of Exile" for Hillel, and on "Recent Canadian Poetry" at Sir George Williams.¹ I count the minutes to the Xmas hols.

Aviva and I finally made it—we saw Fawzia!² She’s about the best advertisement for The Swinging Flesh I’ve ever seen. I think I’ll try to persuade Jack McClelland to hire her to go up and down the country, selling my book. All she’d have to do is paste a copy of The SF on her navel or between her ample breasts. Neon lights would flash on and off between her thighs, and then you’d see the sales mount and mount. And not only the sales.

But we sure missed you and Mary that evening. It’s good to have someone to go lechering with, and you are a real appreciative fellow—lecherer: observe, please, the distinction between a lecherer and a lecher. The former makes an art of it, he’s a sampler. It’s the same difference between a wine-taster and an alcoholic. I hope I make myself clear.

We enjoyed having you and Mary; wish you could come down more often. More bumps and grinds—that’s what the world needs. Fawzia’s Anatomy rather than Frye’s³, eh? I’d like to deposit his pallid head, glasses and all, between
Fawzia’s buttocks and see it rotate in the centre of her-whirling flesh and fat. At the end of that wonderful-circular journey, he’d see the utter foolishness of equating-the creator with the critic. He’d have had a revelation—which is what art is all about. From the neck down, the man-is dead: it infuriates me to think that someone like himself-should pass himself off as a critic, or have anything to do-with poetry. Or look at Roy Daniells’ review of The-Swinging Flesh,\textsuperscript{4} where the old geezer rubs his hands at the-thought that I might at last be abandoning Venus and the-lusts of the flesh. How Yeats would have spat in his damned-eyes. My next batch of stories and poems will have much to-say about all this. What a country! Eunuchs, eunuchs-everywhere.

You speak wistfully about a reconciliation with Louis.-In the first place, it wasn’t I who broke with him: it’s he-who over the years managed a strategic withdrawal. It-wasn’t I who attacked him; it was the other way round. The-trouble began in 1954 when the Americans--Robert Creeley\textsuperscript{5},-Cid Corman\textsuperscript{6}, Charles Olson\textsuperscript{7}, and Pound\textsuperscript{8}—found good things to-say about my work. I still have the letters he wrote me,-hardly those of a friend happy in my success. It was then-that I wrote him not to let my success go to his head. But-it did. And no matter how he may twist and turn, or what-fairy tales he tells himself, it was his envy and that alone-which broke our friendship. Read his article in Culture-(1959).\textsuperscript{9} Read his reviews, and not only those of my own-work, but that of Cohen, or Mandel, or Moscovitch.\textsuperscript{10} He’s a-sick and suffering man—and as such he has my compassion and-sympathy. But like Will Brangwen in The Rainbow,\textsuperscript{11} he’s had-his balls crushed, he’s turned his back on life. His-Cathedral is Poetry,—an escape, not a way of life, or into-life. Reconciliation? How does one go about being-reconciled to a corpse? I despise men without guts and-integrity, who lie to themselves, who cover up their-cowardice and fear of life with a blanket of sweet-moralizings. He may fool others, but not me. I’m his-conscience, his constant reminder of betrayal and defeat,-and therefore he now hates and fears me. Poor devil, he’ll-never again know a happy moment in his life. Anyhow, not-until I depart from it.

Some day I’ll write a great story about all this. I’m-saving everything up, storing my impressions, thinking-furiously about what it all means, adds up to. A poet’s-life is a great symbol, or ought to be:\textsuperscript{12} a stroke of jagged-lightning illuminating the blackness briefly and fiercely.-As I grow older, I see people and events arranging-themselves into a sort of pattern for me, with all things-becoming larger than life. They take on the finality and-inexhaustible suggestiveness of myth. All I want now is the-quiet of an Italian fishing village where I can set it all-down in prose and poetry. When Maxie graduates, and all my-other responsibilities are taken care of, I shall find the-peace and solitude I need for the work I have in mind. I
know what I want to say, and I also know that no one else can say it as well as I can. Inexorably I move towards it. I want to write something at the end that will sum everything up, the formula that Hugo Pfeffer was looking for in my story "Vacation In La Voiselle." It'll be a rather extended formula, I suppose; or not really a formula, but a metaphor, a whole Basil-pot of metaphors. All I know is that I've seen a great deal of living, a great deal of it. Hence my impatience with doctrinaire twerps like Loo Du and Fried Shoes. Only in a country as benighted with Presbyterianism and materialism as Canada, can they be taken seriously: in any other civilized country they'd long ago have been lynched. Mind you, I don't confound Frye with Loo Du. Like yourself, I admire Frye's intellect; and as I told you when you were here, I think his work as a literary theorist is significant and first-rate. It's the would-be critic I attack, the pedant that would cage the poet and make him the vassal of the universities. Nevertheless, alongside him Dudek is a diseased runt.

Well, I'd better end this letter. I suppose I'm so ill-tempered because I see the piled-up exam papers ready to fall on me like an avalanche. Next time I write you my disposition will be sweeter. Give Mary a hug and a kiss for me. Aviva wishes to be remembered to both of you.

With affection,

Layton, "Recent Canadian Poetry," Sir George Williams University, Montreal, 29 November 1961.

1 Fawzia Amir (b. 1925), Cairo born Montreal belly-dancer who danced for King Farouk 1945-47.

2 Worthrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism: see 167.1.


5 Creeley, rev. of A Red Carpet for the Sun, Poetry (Chicago) 98.3 (June 1961): 192.

6 Cid Corman, numerous letters to Irving Layton, beginning in February 1953, Layton Collection, Concordia University.
Dear Irving,

I was delighted to get your letter of December 2 today--I had been wondering whatever had happened to you. I thought perhaps that I had unwittingly said or done something unforgivable during our recent visit to Montreal, & that you had decided to write me off as a friend.

Well, it is good to know that the explanation is simply that you have been busy with examinations. I similarly have been very busy--mainly in preparing the $75,000 budget of the Department of English & the $100,000 budget of the School of Graduate Studies, revising the proofs of the University Calendar & the Calendar of the School of Graduate Studies, & in addition of course carrying on with all the lectures, meetings & essay marking that is the routine of

December 5, 1961
the job. Tonight I give a lecture on poetry to a local women's club—a chore I agreed to perform in a moment of weakness.

So you finally saw Fawzia! You lucky devils! I have a proposition to make. Let's sponsor a joint tour of the girl—for you she can advertise The Swinging Flesh (this would be her breast work) and for me she could advertise Creative Writing in Canada (this would be really hip!)

Which reminds me that my big news is that the new edition of Creative Writing is here. There is both a hardcover edition, & a paperback edition, & both are really handsome. It is much the best job of book design Ryerson have ever done in my opinion. Don't buy a copy, as I shall be sending you one in a day or so. You might, however, talk the book up among your students, & in the bookstores of Montreal.

The new edition of The Book of Canadian Stories is promised for some day in the very near future. They say that it too is very handsome in design & production.

Am very tired now, but shall hope to write to you again in the near future. I gave your hug & kiss to Mary, & ask you to do the same for me with Aviva. But don't go too far!

Love & kisses,
Des P

408. December 12, 1961

Dear Desmond,

Thank you for the letter--and for the book! It’s handsomely brought out, John Colombo or somebody is doing things to Ryerson, quite an improvement over the arsenical green first edition. I haven’t read the whole thing through, but very large chunks I have, and it seems to me the writing is firmer, the judgments less callow. I could start a hundred-and-one brush fires going, disputing this statement or that, (Is Purdy’s forte humour—really?) asking for more light here, more penetration there, but let others make the detractions. For me you’ve written an excellent book and I share what must be your great pride in it. There’s a Johnsonian quality in your work, a sober commonsensedness, a refusal to be stampeded by literary fads and fashions. With Frye and Smith, first it was the "metaphysicals," and now it’s the "mythologizers". But you were the only to put your money on the "realists", and by gum and all the golden hills of Jesu, it’s your horses that have walked off with the pennant. I was particularly pleased by your comments on Souster. Though his scope is somewhat limited, he’s one of the best poets this country has ever seen; far and away better than all the metaphysicals and mythologizers put together. He’ll certainly endure a lot longer than any of them; anyway he’ll be read by others besides literary bone-sorters and critics.

For the most part, your final evaluations are hard to quarrel with. Your say-so’s on Callaghan & MacLennan hit
the mark as if radar-drawn to it. I think you’re over-enthusiastic about Richler7; he’ll probably disappoint you, there’s no mind there, plenty of raw anger though, raw prejudices, but, alas--always the final giveaway--no style. Cohen, on the other hand, has style, that’s what is so hopeful about him, make whatever subtractions and minuses you please. How many Canadian writers do have style? You can count them all on the fingers of one hand.

You must think I’m a very touchy person, Desmond. Do you suppose I get offended that easily and that I break off all relations if anyone says something that displeases me? You and I have been corresponding for nearly ten years, and we’ve said some pretty nasty things to each other. Have I ever once stopped writing to you because you said something I didn’t like? Or even threatened to? I know my quarrels with Dudek, Sutherland, and Everson must sometimes make you wonder about me. But the quarrel or break was never of my seeking. It was Dudek who turned away from me, not the other way round. Ditto for Sutherland. After all, would you really expect castrats and bigoted Catholics to stay friendly towards me? Everson is a swine of another colour. The less said about him the better. The only people who hate me are the people who hate life, literary tricksters, eunuchs. Anyhow, don’t let the goings-on of literary groupings and coteries loom large in your mind. There’s a great big world outside of it, and in that world I’m known personally by hundreds of people. You’d get a much truer picture of me if you talked to them than to frustrated poets. I’m one chap who’s never measured the world by them, not even the successful ones.

Believe me, I’ve never quarrelled except for very good reasons, never merely personal ones. You can damn my eyes to heaven, but as long as you’re for life and poetry, I’ll stay your friend till kingdom come. I’m a touchstone for the life in others. One day I’ll write a great novel about the First Statement Group: John, Louis, Betty and Audrey--and, of course, myself.8 In the meantime, give my love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

1John Robert Colombo worked at Ryerson as an assistant editor 1960-63.

2"His forte seems to be humour, especially satire, and it is probably on his willingness to explore this medium more fully that his future reputation will depend" (246).
Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada 1961.

3The criticism of Samuel Johnson is often characterized as calm, balanced, lucid and reasonable.

4Pacey devotes three and a half pages to a discussion of Souster’s verse in the 1961 edition of Creative Writing in Canada (174-77), beginning with the observation: "Raymond Souster (born 1921), the fourth leading member of this school of social realism, is the most simple and straightforward of them all. Perhaps because of this simplicity, and his complete absence of
pretension, he has never received the recognition which is his due. He is in my opinion one of the most delightful and memorable poets whom Canada has produced."

5209-14.

6217-22.

7Pacey devotes two and a half pages (264-66) to Richler in the revised edition of Creative Writing, concluding with the appraisal:

Richler's vitality is such that one feels secure in predicting a long and productive career for him. If he can continue to improve as rapidly as he did between The Acrobat and The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, he should become a very important novelist indeed. His angry jibes are as much needed to stir Canadians out of their complacency as is the more light-hearted raillery of Robertson Davies.

8See 3.3.

409. December 21, 1961

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of December 12. But you didn’t comment on my proposition for a jointly sponsored tour of Fawzia (re Creative Writing in Canada).

I’m glad you liked the look of the book, & the parts of it you have read. I’ve had an appreciative letter from Purdy¹, & an abusive one from Arthur S. Bourinot. The only review I’ve seen so far was by Robert Fulford in the Toronto Star—he entitled it "The Two Desmond Pacey's"—who turned out to be "Benevolent Pacey" (a good word for everybody) & "Honest Pacey" (a good kick in the ribs for everybody)—it was quite a favourable review, but a very superficial and poorly-written one.

I’m afraid Canadian reviews (in newspapers especially) are bound to be almost useless, since the reviewers don't know enough about the subject to give an informed opinion.

I’ve just had a letter from Ryerson this afternoon saying that the Book of Canadian Stories has just come from the bindery & that I’ll be getting my copies in a day or two. I wonder whether they’ll be sending a copy to you as one of the authors represented? Did you ever collect the $50 permission fee from McClelland & Stewart?

The only writing I’ve done in the last couple of weeks was a review for the Forum of two new books of short stories—by Norman Levine & Ethel Wilson. I think Levine is hitting his stride & may eventually outdistance Richler. There’s one lovely story in his collection called "The Lesson" about a trip by bus to Ottawa. He’s sitting beside a very buxom French girl & learns French by fingering her blouse & getting the word, fingering her this & her that...Lovely! Just made for a "lecherer" like me—by the way I think that word was a very bright invention of yours, & that there is a real distinction between a lecher & a lecherer!
The university closed yesterday and for the next few days I hope to be able to relax & read. I have had Morley Callaghan's new novel waiting for weeks—I'm to review it for Queen's Quarterly & must get at it. Did you see Emery's review of it in Saturday Night—& the terribly embarrassing scene between Emery & Callaghan on Fighting Words a week or so ago? Callaghan has become almost pathologically touchy about adverse criticism—but his later work, it seems to me, gets worse & worse. There's no core to the man—he's all soft mush right through.

Have a good holiday—& give Aviva a good kiss from me!

Love,
Des P

1Al Purdy, letter to Desmond Pacey, undated (c 10 December 1961), Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

2Arthur S. Bourinot, letter to Desmond Pacey, December 1961, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.


6See 402.1.


8Fighting Words, CBC Television, 16 Dec. 1961. (Panelists Morley Callaghan, critic Tony Emery, editors Ralph Allen and Arnold Edinborough; moderator Nathan Cohen. Emery had recently written a negative review of Callaghan's A Passion in Rome in Saturday Night; discussion of the first quotation, Disraeli's statement "Critics are the men who have failed in literature and art" rapidly developed into a heated exchange between the two men.)

December 31, 1961

Dear Desmond,

Your letter, dated December 21st, arrived yesterday. Xmas must have screwed up the mail. I was just about getting ready to drop you a note to ask if this time I had offended you!

Fulford works hard, is on the side of the angels, but too often goes wading beyond his depth. He imagines himself a Leonardo Da Vinci among press columnists, thinks his epitaph will one day read Bob Universal Fulford. He leads a strenuous life, that boy does, trying to plug the holes of his ignorance; one doesn't know which to laugh at more, the desperateness of his undertaking or the futility of it. He'll discourse with equal assurance on the craft of the
short story, Expressionist painting, modern poetry (about which he hasn’t a thimbleful of comprehension), civic corruption, the Cold War, and the cause of genital itch among the Zulus. So when you say you find his review of your book superficial, you hardly tell me anything astonishing. Had you told me otherwise, I’d have been surprised by both of you.

I’ve asked around for The Book of Canadian Short Stories--none of the booksellers have it. One of them did say he’d been expecting delivery for the Xmas [season], his cash register all readied to ring up the anticipated sales to the few literati who will roam the streets at night. Ryerson’s has slipped up, since the book would have made a fine Christmas gift. No, I haven’t rec’d [the] permission fee, but if McClelland & Stewart don’t come through in a week or so, I’ll send a reminder to Jack. Given the money I’ve spent on wines and assorted life-sweeteners this merry, merry season, I could handsomely use said PF.

Tonight we’re going to Frank Scott’s. Smith & his wife will be there, so will Doug Jones¹ and his frau.² Jones is now teaching at Bishop’s. I think the last time I saw him was at the Canadian Arts Conference held in Toronto, but I’m not sure. Whenever I think of him I see a slow sly smile on the side of his mouth opened in a noiseless laugh. His wife has eyes with an intense twinkle in them: a real warm-hearted woman, very sincere about the right things in life. Her name is Kim. They have--or had--a lovely summer place at Keewaydin. It’s there that the Writer’s Conference was planned by Smith, Scott, Dudek, myself and the Joneses over whiskey and insults.³

St Lawrence University--ever hear of it?--has invited me to take part in their annual Arts Festival. Speech in the afternoon,⁴ a reading of my poems at night. The fee is respectable, enabling me to stock up on some more life-sweeteners. The university is in Canton, NY--seems several students of the avantgardiste there have heard my name, own and treasure Red Carpet For The Sun. Also Mount Allison⁵ wants me for a reading. Last year it was University of Manitoba and Dartmouth. Daddio is getting around, wishes he weren’t so clamped down with teaching chores.

Did you see the article on Castro in this Sunday’s New York Times?⁶ Also the interview which defecting Cuban ambassador and longtime loyal friend and supporter Casuso gave to the American press?⁷ What’s your opinion now of the Bearded Boy Wonder? As a poet, of course, I have an inestimable advantage over flat-footed earthlings like yourself: I smelled the fellow’s rottenness a long time ago, and predicted the course he’d take. A re-reading of my letters to you ought to make for a very sobering experience. And how do you think my boy Kennedy is shaping up? Did you see the newsreels of the welcome the Colombians gave him?⁸ He’s saved all our skins, including those of the socialist blabbermouths.
Have you read Donleavy’s *The Ginger Man*? Gusto, style, wonderful mixture of Irish melancholy and madness. I read chapters of it to Henry Moscovitch at Murrays, made the middle-tables, food, and clientele hop with astonishment and affront. Another chap who writes a magnificent prose is Douglas Woolf. I have two of his books, *The Hypocritic Days* and *Fade Out*. The latter is put out by the Grove Press as a paperback. First-class writing, the likes not seen these poverty-stricken days. Am also reading C. Wright Mills’ *The Sociological Imagination*.

I think I’ve finally come up with the real meaning of *Hamlet*, the one Shakespeare himself had in mind when he wrote the play. I might give it to the world in an article for the Queen’s Quarterly, or make it the subject of my lecture at St Lawrence University. Everybody from Coleridge on has missed the point. My theory also explains why they did. It’s really fabulous, and I’m tremendously excited by it.

Aviva sends her love to you & compliments for the Fawzia quip, one of your best. Our good wishes to you and Mary for 1962.

Love,
Irving


:Alan Pearson, "Lost in the Feud: Is it Worth 27 Cents?"

1D.G. Jones (b. 1929), poet (*The Sun is Axeman* 1961), and critic (*Butterfly on Rock: a Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature* 1970), Professor of English at the University of Sherbrooke 1963-present.


3Keewaydin was a small poetry conference organized by Louis Dudek held on Thanksgiving weekend, 1953, at the cottage of Doug and Kim Jones in Keewaydin; the informal meeting inspired Scott to organize the national poetry conference, the "Kingston Conference." (see 2.7)

4The Steinman Festival of the Arts, Saint Lawrence University, Canton, New York.

5Irving Layton, poetry reading, Mount Allison University, Sackville, 1962.


8Half a million Colombians gave Kennedy an enthusiastic welcome in Bogota where the US President had talks with President Lleras Camago, on a weekend visit 16-17 December 1961.

Dear Irving & Aviva,

Thank you very much indeed for the delightful cookiejar which arrived unscheduled the other day from Ogilvie’s. It is very attractive indeed, & is a very fine gesture on your part.

Two exciting things have happened just as I was writing this. You remember my accident near Rivière du Loup on the way up last November? When I got back here, I had the car repaired at a cost of $103, & sent the bill to Fargo Construction Co whose truck had hit me. I heard nothing in reply, so two weeks ago saw a young lawyer here who’s an old student of mine. He wrote to them--& lo & behold has just phoned to say he has a cheque in from them for $105!

I phoned Mary to tell her the good news, & she in turn told me that she was glancing through Weekend magazine & found an article on Fawzia! I asked if you had written it --but she said not! Why don’t we collaborate on a series of "appreciations" of exotic dancers?

To get back to your present--it’s lovely. In partial recompense, I’m sending you today a copy of The Book of Canadian Stories, which has just arrived from Ryerson Press. I don’t like the look of the book as well as that of Creative Writing, but at least it has some sense of style in its format.

Another recent development is that I have received a tentative offer of a house in Cambridge for next year. A friend of mine there put an ad in the local paper, & got two offers of large furnished houses. The better one has four bedrooms (our minimum need) & rents for 10 pounds a week fully furnished. So the Cambridge venture is now one step nearer reality.

I’m now busy doing the final revisions on Our Literary Heritage, the Senior High School anthology I am editing for joint Macmillan-Ryerson publication. After a year of delay while they consulted teachers & superintendents all over the country, they have now offered me a firm contract & a handsome advance on royalties. If the book is widely
adopted, as seems likely, it could give me an additional income of several thousand a year!

And yet, though I am now in danger of becoming a capitalist, I still favour Castro! You're all wet about that. Kennedy made a grave mistake--his only grave one so far--in that Cuban fiasco. Castro is a fine fellow. I grow more radical as the years pass, & you, sir, grow more conservative. Shame on you!

Hope you had a good party at Frank Scott's. I know Jones & his wife--met them at the Kingston Conference.

Yes, I know of St. Lawrence U--Canton, NY. Quite a progressive place. But you'll have to be careful in Mt Allison--a very prudish place.

How about lending me your copy of The Ginger Man? I'd love to read it.

Have just finished Callaghan's latest--a lame effort, terribly slow-moving. Never heard of Douglas Woolf. Who is he?

Glad you've solved the Hamlet enigma. What's the theory?

Have just had a new short story accepted by The Atlantic Advocate--about a rural NB election.²

Love & kisses, Des


412. January 8, 1962

Dear Irving,

I now have an extra copy of the Fulford review, so I am sending it on to you. What do you think of it? I thought Fulford was a very bright young man, but this strikes me as a poorly written and poorly argued review. The quotations from the book are all subtly distorted (by omissions of qualifying words & phrases etc) so as to give quite a false picture of what I was saying.

Yesterday I wrote my review of Callaghan's A Passion in Rome for Queen's Quarterly.¹ I have made it a kind of review article of Callaghan's career, and I think it is the most sensible account yet given of his failure to develop into a great novelist.

This is going to be quite a term for poets at UNB. Dudek comes in mid-February, Birney in late February, & Souster in May!² Incidentally, I've been asked to prepare a brief on behalf of a National Poetry Centre, to be financed by Canada Council, whose chief function would be to move poets about the country to give readings. Culture is booming!

I read the Weekend article on Fawzia. Not worthy of her! I'm sure you could have been much more eloquent on the subject!

Love & kisses, Des Pacey
enclosure: Fulford review (see 409.3).

1See 402.1.

2Louis Dudek, poetry reading, the University of New Brunswick, 16 February 1962.
Earle Birney, poetry reading, the University of New Brunswick, 24 February 1962.
Rayniond Souster, poetry reading, the University of New Brunswick, 10 May 1962.

413.

January 10, 1962
Dear Desmond,

Thank you very much for your book—a "cookie jar" of short stories. I like your "foreword," it's one of the best you've done. Your biographical notes are also well-written, helpful. I intend to go through the book from beginning to end, and will reserve comments on the stories until then. Your own story "The Boat" is, as you know, one of my favourites. I'm glad you included it. It stands up very well beside the others. The format is disappointing, a typical Ryerson "dullity". Those people have no imagination, no sense of merchandising. Why can't they hire a decent book designer, someone who will do more than just dip the book in a dye and haul it out again? In the long run, since sales would increase, they'd find the investment paying off handsomely.

I hope your projected Our Canadian Heritage fares better. I'm delighted to learn you've been offered a firm contract and a sizeable advance on royalties. An additional income of several thousand a year!--that's great news. I hope you spend it all on whores and whiskey. Have you any idea when the book will appear? Is that the one you were telling me about, a small number of poets, each of them represented by a large number of poems? If that's the one, I'm wondering which you selected from my opus? And I too shall be getting royalties--isn't this a jolly world!--though nothing to compare with yours. By the way, of the fifty dollars that McClelland & Stewart rec'd for my story, I got half of that sum. The next time I sign a contract I shall have it carefully gone over by my lawyer and my accountant.

Have you seen Exchange? The editor was here last week, the publisher last night. You might have met the latter. He's Robert Hershorn, a scion of the clothing industry. He told me he sank $15,000 on the first two issues. Unless he can get some other garment scions with him, the magazine is going to fold up. He's going to see Bronfman (Seagram's) in the hope of shaking him down for $10,000. I doubt he'll succeed. It'll be a joke if he does, however, for Exchange took my latest poem called "The Real Values"—a most nasty and hard-hitting poem on the corruption of Judaism, in which there's a clear reference to the role of the distilleries, not to mention, the clothing industry as well. Someone is going to holler blue murder when the next number comes out!
Norman Mailer is coming to Montreal next week. He reads at McGill, or lectures. I'm not certain which. Afterwards there'll be a small party for him, given by Exchange to which Aviva and I have been invited. I'm anxious to see him. I think he's an unhappy man, like Dylan Thomas, a crack-up to whom fame came too early. His *Advertisements for Myself* is a sorrowful thing. Writers should never apologize, never explain. His book does just that. It gives an impression of weakness, self-pity. Its subtleties and insights derive from surrender, defeat, and all the noise and shouting can't drown out the fear and dismay in his voice. Genius is not enough these days—one needs courage and pride as well.

So you're still with Castro, and think because I'm against him, I've turned conservative. "Pacey, the Firebrand of Fredericton"! I cheer myself with the thought that in the 30's you would have been equally a staunch supporter of Stalin, and said the same silly things then that you do now. Plainly you've not read the recent books and articles on Castro. He's evidently become a megalomaniac—but to hell with him. It's the totalitarianism he's fastened on the Cubans I hate him for, and for which I'd gleefully slit his throat. Kennedy's mistake was in being half-hearted, in not landing the marines. Still, I believe Castro's days are numbered. The whole evolution of Latin America is against him. He's isolated Cuba, made it dependent upon Russia, shackled his people with a loathsome dictatorship. You can have him. To me he'll always be the bastard who betrayed the revolution for personal glory...Moscovitch has *The Ginger Man*. Will send it later.

Love,
Irving

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3*Our Literary Heritage* (see 318.1); Layton however is thinking of Pacey's project which became *Major Canadian Writers*; see 319.1.


5Robert Hershorn (b. 1932), Montreal manufacturer and film producer, co-producer of Claude Jutra's *A tout prendre* (1963), publisher of *Exchange*, son of Samuel Hershorn, clothing manufacturer.

6See 275.3.


8Norman Mailer (b. 1923), American novelist and journalist, author of *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) and *Armies of the Night* (1968).
January 12, 1962

Dear Desmond,

Thanks for letter & clipping. Fulford is a well-meaning ass, on the side of the angels really, but just a trifle envious of their wings. His review of your book is good journalism—eye-catching and superficial. But it won’t hurt the sales of your book, au contraire. It’s always seemed to me, the ephemerality of what they write is sufficient punishment for their sins.

Take it from me, you’ve written the best account of this country’s literary growth. Your scholarship is irreprouachable, your judgements are fair, and your comments or observations usually illuminating and original. You’ve pulled no punches, you haven’t let the "big names" overawe you. You must expect a lot of brickbats thrown at you; I’d collect them and make a garland out of them for your stubbornness and courage. Your book will be the standard text on the subject for many, many years to come. Again, my very warm congratulations.

I’m eager to see your essay on Callaghan. It ought to be the definitive statement on him.

This is the week for exchanging newspaper clippings. I still haven’t got over the Ottawa experience. It was tremendous.

With love & kisses.

Yours in Fawzia,

Irving


1See 402.1.

2Irving Layton, poetry reading, Le Hibou Coffee House, Ottawa, 10 Jan. 1962.

January 15, 1962

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of January 10.

I believe Ryerson Press has now engaged a book designer, & that my two new editions are among his first products. Actually, Creative Writing and Mandel’s Poetry 62 are both I think very attractive books, & considerably better than most Canadian books. I agree with you in not liking the format of BCS, but there are many people who do like it. That particular shade of green is not one I like, & the blue is not in sharp enough contrast with it. A
slightly different shade of green, with that spray of leaves in pure white say, might have been very interesting indeed.

You seem to be mixed up about the book for which I have just signed a contract. It is not *Our Canadian Heritage* but *Our Literary Heritage*, & it is an anthology (the only one I know) that begins with Chaucer & comes up to Dylan Thomas but also includes representative American & Canadian work in the nineteenth & twentieth century sections. It is to be used as a Grade XII text in New Brunswick & the publishers hope that it will be adopted in Ontario, BC, Nova Scotia, & perhaps other provinces. If it is used in NB alone it will net me only a few hundred dollars a year—but of course if it caught on from coast to coast it would mean an income of thousands a year. Let’s remember that is a very big if—and not talk as if I already had that income, or even had a certain prospect of it. The reason you’ve forgotten about this book is that it has been so long in the works. I was working hard at it when you were here for your reading—remember that Saturday afternoon you asked me what I would be doing if you weren’t there, & I said I would be working at my high school anthology? I finished the book in August 1960 after two years of hard work—and then the publishers took over a year to circulate the manuscript among high school teachers, superintendents etc from coast to coast. What also slowed the process down is that the book is a joint Macmillan-Ryerson publication, & every decision had to be double-checked. I felt very discouraged about the delay, but I suppose the delay will pay off in the end. The reassuring thing is that after this fifteen months of consultation the two publishers have agreed that the book (which will run to over 700 pages & cost a lot in permission fees) is a good risk & are willing to pay me an advance on royalties which will help a lot with the projected overseas year.

Enough about myself. Why don’t you & Aviva take a weekend off to come down & visit us? We’d love to see you.

About Castro—four of our students just returned from spending their vacation in Cuba & agree with me 100% about Castro! They are quite conservative—one, eg, is the son of Colonel Dailley, CO of Camp Gagetown—but they think Castro has the people behind him, has done great things for the country, & is at heart a democratic socialist! You disgusting old reactionary!

Love & kisses,

Des Pacey

PS Neither *Exchange* nor *Canada Month* deserve to survive—both deadly dull! DP

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2A Book of Canadian Stories.
Our Literary Heritage was used as the course text in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia 1967-82, and in New Brunswick until 1990 (a revised edition by Michael Pacey having appeared in 1982); it was also used as a supplemental text in several other provinces.

Colonel Gordon D. Dailley, Commander of Camp Gagetown, 1 May 1961 to April 30 1964; his eldest son Gordon D. Dailley (b. 1941), business executive, manager of African Lion Safari.

Canada Month began publication on October 6, 1961 (a "forerunner" issue appeared on July 1) as a monthly news magazine published by Canada Week of Montreal and edited by Daniel Woodward. The final issue (vol. 12.6) appeared in December 1972 after two erratic years of publishing.

416. January 18, [1962]

Dear Irving,

I'm too busy to write more than a note--but thanks for your note of the 12th & the enclosed clippings about Ottawa. You certainly seem to have been a hit in the capital! Did Charlotte Whitten show up?

I expect to be involved in a similar traffic jam in a few minutes--I am to appear on a panel on sex, & I gather everybody in town from high school students to frustrated grandmothers is going to be there to watch the fireworks.

Purdy is replacing you as my most prolific correspondent--he's bombarding me two or three times a week with poems, stories & plays for criticism.¹ The poems are often excellent, the plays deft--but the stories so far are weak. He's a damn interesting guy, though.

Am tentatively booking passage on the Cunard liner Saxonia sailing from M'tl on August 23. Have been offered a very reasonable family rate.

Up Fawzia & at 'em!

Love,
Des P

¹Purdy had sent Pacey six letters in the previous three months, including drafts of the stories "There Was An Old Woman Of" and "Pisces Inarticula," and the poems "Love Poem" and "Poem for One of the Annettes."


Dear Desmond,

So now finally I know what book you're talking about. My congrats and good wishes still hold, even though I have to switch mental images. Say, that's an important anthology you've done, the first one I believe that puts the Canadian right there alongside the English and American. It'll bring you a mint of money, ought to, certainly. I hope, with you, the book is adopted by all the schools in the country, not only because it'll make you a bloated capitalist but because it will give the students a truer idea of the development of English poetry.

Purdy was in town several days ago. He dropped in with a former student of mine, Alan Pearson¹--you may have seen some of his poems in the Canadian Forum²--drank up all my
sherry, talked the usual nonsense literary blokes talk when they get together, and then departed. Purdy is angling for a job in the CBC--news re-write man, something like that. I find him difficult to talk to. Perhaps it’s his shyness, or a vulnerable, uneasy self most writers drag about with them, but most of the time he gives me an uninvolved laugh or grin behind which he hides and calculates. When he writes he drops all that; his real passionate self comes out, wounded and impotent or wildly triumphant. If he had a sense of form, he’d be a grand poet; but he hasn’t, and like Souster his successful poems are a hit-and-miss affair, and, again, like Souster, both his form and content are monotonous. There’s little emotional variety in either one of them. Neither one is a true maker, an artist.

I was in Toronto about a week ago, for a Fighting Words program. It’ll be on next Monday. On the panel with me were Marcus Long, philosopher, Henry Wolfson, economist, and--for me the most understanding of the lot--Jean Shepherd, an American novelist. It was one of the better shows: anyway, Nathan Cohen thought so, and gave us a fattish approving smile when it was over. Earlier in the day, I had seen Jack McClelland and Milton Wilson; not together, of course. Wilson too is getting a sabbatical leave this year, and intends to live in London, working on a book on Byron. It should be interesting. Not much critical work has been done on B’s poetry, his personality perhaps getting too much in the way of a careful reading of his poems. For me he’s a whole lot more interesting than either Shelley or Keats, the former being all but unreadable today. Like myself, like Nietzsche, Byron had a profound contempt for poets and poetry. The good ones do, you know. It’s only the lesser ones who are taken in by all the fiddle-faddle. That’s what Hamlet is really all about, and the Prince’s conflict, (the thing which keeps him from destroying his uncle) is that between poet and revolutionist.

They who have the power to hurt and will do none,
Who do not do the thing they most do show;
Who moving others are themselves as stone,
Unmoving, cold, and to temptation slow,
They rightly do inherit heaven’s graces...

One rightly comes back to Shakespeare again and again.

Power, that’s what poetry at its best is. Exuberance, energy, and a laughing disdain for everything that is weak and self-pitiful. Homer, Milton, Dante, Goethe--these were gods. Shall we ever see their likes again?

Love,
Irving

1 Alan Pearson (b. 1930), journalist and business writer, poet (Freewheeling thru Gossamer Dragstrips 1975), author of the novel In a Bright Land (1983).

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of January 22, and the news of Purdy, Pearson etc. I agree with you about Purdy’s deficient sense of form.

Incidentally, I spent most of my spare moments this past week writing a long review-article on Mandel’s Poetry 62 for the Canadian Forum. It hasn’t been typed yet, but when it is I’ll send you (or lend you) a carbon of it. I think it’s a lively article, & it certainly hits hard at people like Wilfred Watson & Kenneth McRobbie. I’ll be most interested to get your reaction to it, & to see to what extent we are in agreement about the younger poets in the country. I think Jones & Gotlieb now show more promise than Purdy & Acorn, for example.

I saw from [the] CBC Times that you were to be on Fighting Words. I believe we’ll be seeing that show this Monday night, & Mary & I will be looking forward to it.

One of my stories was on Drainie’s story programme this Thursday—Mary heard it, but I was busy with my honours seminar. He has just accepted another story of mine, but rejected this one which I’m enclosing for your criticism. "The Candidate" has been sold to the Atlantic—but the CBC has rejected it. Can you tell me why?

Are you anxious to see my Callaghan review before it appears in QQ? If so, I’ll send you a copy.

When are you going to send me Ginger Man?
Reviews of Creative Writing have appeared in several newspapers, & all so far have been very complimentary. I’m sending you the only review of which I have an extra copy—Klinck’s in the Globe & Mail.9

By the way, did you see the article on Canadian poets in the Jan 20 issue of The Globe Magazine?10 It begins by quoting me--& has pictures of most of the poets & is very laudatory (though superficial). Written by a chapbook poetess, Joan Finnigan.11

Louis is to be with us for three days in mid-February—from Friday morning Feb 16 to Sunday evening Feb 18. Should be fun!

Keep the letters coming!

As ever,
Des

enclosure: "The Candidate"


2Pacey’s comments on Watson were negative:
In some of his earlier poems, notably "The Windy Bishop" and "Canticle of Darkness," Watson did occasionally approximate the touchstones, but the long poem by which he is represented here seems to me to fail on all four counts. The meaningless repetitions, the frequent digressions, the often functionless echoes of and allusions to Eliot and other poets, and the refusal to speak plainly—all these suggest that Watson is far from being in command of either his material or his method.(18)

3McRobbie’s poetry did not impress Pacey:
I’ll be frank and admit that Kenneth McRobbie eludes me completely. His work seems to me to embody all the fashionable tricks of the beat generation—parentheses that begin and never end, the evasion of syntax, unregulated images of desolation—but none of the weird compulsive power that people like Ginsberg occasionally achieve. Here, I suggest, we witness at first hand the conformity of the coffee bar. (18)

4Phyllis Gotlieb (b. 1926) poet (Within the Zodiac 1964; Ordinary, Moving 1969), and author of science fiction novels and stories.


6John Drainie (1916-1966), radio announcer, narrator and actor who joined the CBC in 1941 and appeared in many CBC stage drama series.


9Carl Klinck, rev. of Creative Writing in Canada by Desmond Pacey, Globe and Mail 10 Jan. 1962: 23.
February 3, 1962

Dear Desmond,

Your short story and letter came early in the week, as well as your review article. No, that arrived a few days later. I couldn’t write you because during the week it’s a mad life for me from one teaching assignment to another. Besides, I gave my High School students some exams in History and Composition and had to spend precious hours correcting them. God, when will I get off this treadmill? Miraculously, I’ve been overflowing with poems, some excellent ones too, but they’re much too long to type, and anyway you’ll be seeing them shortly in The Canadian Forum or Exchange. One of the poems I wrote is called "Five Women," very deft portraits of women I’ve known, in an arrangement that’s really original. I also wrote a poem for Norman Mailer, called "The Dazed Steer" and a longish thing composed of ten short things, called "The Sparks Fly." Here are two "sparks" from it:

On the waxed twine
Of her affection
her mouth goes up & down
like a yo-yo.

Ah, the dung-beatles that want my blood.
Age and possessions have turned me into stone.
There’s no blood in a stone.
Bang!
Out of their crushed limbs
I also make poems.

At this point, I know, you’re muttering under your breath, "That damned egotist, Layton—I send him a short story and a review article, and he’s off chattering about his poems. A load of manure should fall on his head!" But it wasn’t egotism, my mind simply guttered that way with the first wind that blew.

I liked your story very much indeed. So did Aviva. Why the CBC turned it down puzzles me as much as it does you. Maybe they didn’t get the point of it, or if they did, didn’t like it. I found your portraiture of Benson subtle, and the whole development of your story surprising and original. He was a poor shit; he deserved to fail, to be at
the bottom of the poll. Your treatment of him was an excellent (and very difficult) blend of compassion and irony. Maybe the CBC humanitarian were outraged by your outlook, your implied championing of Kramer. An outlook such as yours in these democratic days when we’re all supposed to be on the side of the underdog may not go well with the moguls of the CBC. Anyway, I for one, am glad to see you move off from that kind of sentimentalism; just as I was glad to see you abandon the "compassion kick" in your treatment of Morley Callaghan. What’s wanted is some good hard thinking, and a good hard look at our fellowmen, and the courage to say unpleasant things about them straight to their faces. Which is exactly what you do in "The Candidate" and why it has my enthusiastic vote as one of your best stories.

Your review article is certainly lively. I’m handicapped, however, in discussing it, since I’ve only glanced briefly at the contents of the book in one of the downtown stores, not owning a copy of my own. There’s nothing I would take exception to, I think, in the comments you make on the individual poets. From what I know of their work, they seem very antipode. Colombo, McRobbie, Hine, Purdy—you hit the target, it seems to me, dead-centre. And yes, Watson. I don’t, however, share your enthusiasm for Avison—the work simply leaves me unmoved, though Wilson, Smith, and now yourself, tell me I ought not to be. Perhaps the fault lies in me, and in time her work will grip me as it has so distinguished a trio. To date, I find it clever lattice-work: the feelings and thoughts are stale; it’s the language and apparent modernity of technique that fools you into thinking them otherwise. I must also say the lines you quote from Reaney seem to me quite undistinguished, hardly the "touchstone" you make them out to be. Well, the truth is, I don’t like the way most Canadian poets use language: nowadays I want poems to be like a steel dagger, unsheathed and gripped for the plunging. There’s altogether too much ba—ahing. In Reaney’s lines, where’s the "personal involvement" you ask for, the urgency to speak out of the terror or delight which the poet has known? Is he a poet, really, anymore than Hine is? I grant he has more warmth in him than Hine does, and he’s in every way more commendable—but still, my question remains, "is he a poet?" Or merely a very deft user of words, what the Communists in the 30s used to call an ideologist. As for the others—Jones, yes, he’s good, and getting better. Harney, he’ll never make it, since he’s not a poet. I know him personally. Gotlieb has a few more good poems in her. Bates’ work I don’t know. It’s a pity Cohen is, as you say, misrepresented in the Anthology. He has more genuine talent in [his] toenail than, excepting one or two, all the others put together. Perhaps you’re a little too harsh on Mandel; perhaps your voice in the article [is] somewhat schoolmasterish, as though you were using the poets as illustration-material for
a lesson. But you've got the courage to speak clearly. This country is lucky to have you.

Hugs,
Irving


3 Layton, "Five Women," Balls for a One-Armed Juggler 87-89 (no magazine publication).


6 Layton refers to Pacey's enthusiastic remarks:
Margaret Avison is represented by three characteristic poems in which she celebrates epiphanies, moments of escape from the bondage of time and space. In her poems one does encounter the resonance of real poetry, in lines such as these...Miss Avison's work impresses me also by its integrity: her vision is distinctive, her attitude is consistent and sure (18).

7 Reaney's work is also praised by Pacey:
Reaney's approach is oblique, his tone is wry, and his effects are charming (though also, at times, terrifying). Rather than attacking his subject from above, he is busily chipping away at its soft underbelly. He is easily the most deft artist among the English-speaking poets represented here. These lines may have little resemblance to Yeats and Donne, but they are a touchstone of their own kind (18).

8 John Paul Barney (b. 1931), Quebec city native, lecturer in English at the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph.

9 Layton refers to Pacey's remark:
Leonard Cohen is also off-form. Presumably all his best recent work had gone into A Spice-Box of Earth, and these four tentative poems were leftovers. Only the slightly humorous "For Marianne" has any adhesive power. (19)

10 Mandel's verse was criticized by Pacey:
A brief essay by Mr Mandel on what he considers to be the most interesting feature within this wide range would have been most welcome. In short, I wish that he hadn't played it so safe in this preface: attacking conformity and asserting breadth of range is remaining altogether too much in the shelter of agreement (17).

February 8, 1962
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of February 3 and for The Ginger Man, which arrived yesterday. I read most of the latter last evening, & found it very lively & stimulating. He's a man who enjoys the female form, & especially the female breast, almost as much as I do!

Sorry to hear you are so damnably busy, though it's a state that seems to afflict us all these days. I finish
every day in a state of complete exhaustion—last evening was the first free evening I have had in two weeks. I start in at eight in the morning & am tied up at the university till ten or eleven almost every night.

I wish you would send me some of your new poems. I enjoy reading them. Those samples were "more-ish".

I'm glad you liked my story & my review article. The theme of the former was really Yeats' lines about "the best lack all conviction"—Benson wasn't quite the poor shit you suggest, but he was weak, & if our protest against the Kramers is to have such feeble champions the Kramers will always win—as they do in Canada today.

The review article was a kind of jeu d'esprit, & I especially like the first paragraph. Perhaps I sound too kind to Avison & Reaney—what I meant to say about them was that they were technically superior to the others, knew more exactly what they were trying to do—but that what they were doing was of peripheral importance. Doesn't that come out of the article?

Today I received a copy of a long review article of my two books from the Toronto Telegram of last Saturday—almost the whole of the book page, with pictures of me & Reaney & Grove & Wilson Macdonald (an odd group!) as illustrations. The review isn't very well-informed, but it's good publicity. Various people have written to say the books, & especially the paperback of Creative Writing, are selling like hotcakes, especially in college bookstores.

Wish I had something else to send you, but I haven't. Will try to write again soon.

How's Aviva? I trust she's writing too. And Max? Still the great seducer? Wish we could foregather for a few drinks!

Love,
Des Pacey

1W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," Variorum 401-02; (Pacey quotes line 7).

2"The Candidate" describes a rural county council election between the wealthy self-assured incumbent (Kramer) and an insecure newcomer (Benson).

3Pacey refers to the opening paragraph of his review:
The contemporary Canadian poet certainly cannot complain of neglect. Anthologized in books and magazines and on the radio, cheered on campuses and in coffee bars, bemedalled and fellowed by the Canada Council, featured on Fighting Words and fawned upon by ambitious academics, he is the white-haired boy of all our festivals, the rival of Richard and Mahovlich, the Paul Anka of the classes. No wonder that there are so many aspirants for the laurels, so many new poets blossoming that the critic finds himself swooning with the heady mixed perfumes of the flowers. (17)

February 16, 1962

Dear Desmond,

A happy thought, that of yours. I hope nothing goes wrong with the plans and we can make the trip together. The TCA\(^1\) phoned me several days ago and said they'd call back. I haven't heard from them yet. It seems someone in Toronto informed TCA I'd be returning to Montreal on Saturday at 11:00am. The idiot! That's when I'm supposed to be panellizing (my own coinage). Or was this a subtle way of telling me that nobody was really interested in hearing what I had to say? Send the blighter back before he has a chance to open his mouth!

I'm glad your book is receiving such splendid coverage. It deserves no less, of course. You're the only considerable critic in this country who was willing to put his hands to the plough. Your harvest is richly deserved. I haven't seen the paperback edition yet, but I'll slip into a bookstore tomorrow on my way to the university and have a peek at it. Since it fills a very important and very definite need, it ought to have a continuous sale for a long time to come, perhaps forever. Anyway, your friend hopes so.

Don't tell me I liked your excellent story for the wrong reasons! Both Aviva and I read its meaning the same way, and thought it a wonderful un-corny way of looking at the personal drama of the two men, Kramer and Benson. The latter is a poor shit, though there is compassion in your portraiture of him. I didn't read--I doubt anyone else would--your story as a commentary on Canadian politics; and your argument that Benson lacked a motivating conviction with which to defeat Kramer might be abstractly true, but nowhere enters into or is suggested in the story itself. No, I frankly like my own version of your tale much better than I like yours. As I said in my previous letter, it gives an original twist to an otherwise familiar enough situation and does what good art is always supposed to do: make people take a fresh look at their familiar notions. I've since repeated your tale to several friends and acquaintances and their reaction is the same as mine. How clever of him! So take a bow, Herr Pacey.

I don't want to enter into an argument with you about the merits of Reaney or Avison. Perhaps you did state their peripheral status and I was too obtuse to catch it. I wasn't really taking exception to your estimate of them as much as I was using them as whipping-boys for my own notions of what I think poetry might be. Too much that is being written today in verse leaves me with the feeling of its "peripherality", its remoteness from that reality which must always be the springboard for the imagination. It just doesn't seem important enough, for all the breathlessness and frantic gesturings that accompany the utterance. I get the same dismayed feeling when I try to re-read Patrick Anderson. Hopeless! The language is phoney, the emotions are unreal. But mainly what he has to say is not important.
And that's how I feel about Reaney's work and much of Avison's. Maybe in time my judgement or my feelings will be more charitable.

Aviva, our Aviva has arrived! Her publisher had tea with her yesterday afternoon and told her the firm is keeping all twelve stories. They've also commissioned her to do a child's book on Australia, or rather a book on Australia for children. My own book will be on McClelland's desk by Sept. Ça va! Love to Mary. Keep well, and don't overwork.

Hugs,
Irving

enclosure: ts "Love Among the Cannibals", "The Ritual Cut" and "Moral with a Story," Balls for a One-Armed Juggler 90, 19, 44.

1Trans-Canada Airlines.


3Aviva Layton, How the Kookabura Got His Laugh (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975).


February 28, [1962]

Dear Irving,

Just a note to let you know the good news--I have been awarded a Canada Council Senior Research Fellowship for 1962-3! Whoop!

And to thank you for your company & kindness last weekend. I greatly enjoyed our talks together, Aviva's delicious goulash, and the general stimulation which you as usual provided.

Birney was already here Sunday when I got back, so I've been tied up with him until this morning, when he left for Quebec city. His reading of poems was not as well attended as Louis's, but we had a big crowd out for the Graduate Dinner last night and he gave a very good talk about the writer & the Canadian university--actually it would have been a very useful contribution to last weekend's conference.

Well, I am away behind in my work so I'll stop now. Give my regards to Max. I do hope that both you & Aviva are over your colds. Mine is almost better.

Love,
Des

1Pacey was awarded a Canada Council Senior Fellowship for a year of study at Cambridge.

2See 412.2.

3Pacey and Layton had attended the Student Conference on Creative Writing in Canada, sponsored by the National Federation of Canadian University Students at Hart House, University of
Toronto, 22-24 February 1962. Pacey read a paper "The Young Writer in Canada," (Essays in Canadian Critics 221-38) and sat on a panel with Layton, Jay Macpherson and Pierre Trudeau. The lead speech "The Writer and the Critic," by Northrop Frye "was a closely reasoned argument in favor of criticism as an autonomous discipline and scholarship as the natural training for the poet." John Robert Colombo; see 427.5

423. [tg] March 5, 1962
So you leave us for Leavis Wonderful news Love. Laytons.

424. March 9, 1962
Dear Des,

Forgive my silence. I put away two separate evenings this week in which to write you, and both of them were taken up by unexpected visitors from outer space. John Hamilton of the CBC was in Montreal, covering the Education front, and wanted to see me about arranging a panel of Sir G Williams' students. Have you ever met him? He's three times as stout as he ought to be, has a drooping walrus moustache which, as he has rather mild blue eyes, gives him the appearance of a benignant Bismarck. He's travelled much, seen much, listened to many of the commanding great of our time. For all that, he appears—perhaps all very corpulent people do—extremely naive. It's the skinny people who become corrupted: the fat ones put on flesh and virtue.

My other visitor was the editor of The Kingston Whig-Standard, Robert O'Brien. I had previously met him at a party given for Mailer, where we learned we had the same compulsive interest in childhood smells. We at once engaged in a competition to see who could call up the most vivid smells of childhood. I think I won by a nostril-hair. He's an interesting fellow, a former librarian of the RMC at Kingston. He was in Montreal to receive some sort of prize for a review article he had done on a book about education. You know this is Education Week, when all the charlatans and racketeers get together to see who can piss longest and best into the ear of the Canadian taxpayer. The damn crooks! I attended a Conference on education two or three years ago, the one that was addressed by Conant, and another swindler, equally suave and ignorant, from the British Isles. I vomited in the faces of both of them. I like to brag, so I can tell you, this is one field, Education, where no one, and I mean no one—not, certainly, the Northrop Fryes—can throw dust into my eyes. Education in this country is the biggest all-time swindle. There are more frauds, crooks, racketeers, humbugs and prostitutes connected with it than in any racket ever handled by Al Capone or Schultz. All together I've been teaching for more than thirty years, in High Schools, Universities, not to speak of a long stint in Adult Education; and if I have one abiding conviction it's the one I've just expressed about Education in this country.
The teachers? They are unintelligent slaves, with the lowest IQ of any profession in North America, with a large percentage below normal intelligence. Anybody with guts or self-respect gets out of the teaching racket as soon as he can.

But to hell with this noise!

Have you read Steiner yet? There's a bright young critic for you. Pick up the paperback, Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. An impressive work. Here's his opening sentence: "Literary criticism should arise out [of] a debt of love." And farther on: "Not to judge or to anatomize, but to mediate. Only through love of the work of art, only through the critic's constant and anguished recognition of the distance which separates his craft from that of the poet, can such mediation be accomplished. It is a love made lucid through bitterness: it looks on miracles of creative genius...yet it knows it has no part or merely the slightest, in their actual creation."

Compare this with the arrogant lucubrations of that fartless pipsqueak, Frye!

Yes, that was a wonderful weekend with you. I enjoyed every moment of it. You gave an excellent paper. My admiration for you continues to grow. May we always be warm and close friends.

Love,
Irving

PS That's really wonderful news, your getting the Senior Fellowship. All the Laytons are thrilled, and very proud of you, and wish all the luck in the world.

1John Hamilton (b. 1911), CBC radio producer, director and writer, UN correspondent for various newspapers and news agencies in Canada and Australia, producer of The White North: A Journey to the Northwest Territories (1972), and American Gothic (1969).

2Robert O'Brien, editor of the Kingston Whig-Standard.

3See 203.1.

4Al Capone ("Scarface") (1899-1947), famous American gangster who dominated organized crime in Chicago from 1925 to 1931.

5"Dutch Schultz" (Arthur Flegenheimer; 1902-1935), New York bootlegging gangster of the twenties and thirties.


March 17, 1962
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of March 9. I am sorry to have been so long answering it, but I have been infernally busy ever since getting back from Toronto.
As I think I told you, Earle Birney was already here when I arrived, & he stayed for the next three days. I interviewed him on the radio, introduced him at the Graduate Dinner, & entertained him for several meals & parties at our home.

Well, Birney had scarcely left when Frank Underhill arrived to be our Founder’s Day speaker, & as I am chairman of the FD committee I had to act as his host for three days & hold several parties in his honour.

The net effect of all of this was that I got away behind in my regular work, & have been trying ever since to dig my way out of the pile of correspondence, essays, lecture notes etc etc.

And the result of this in turn is that I have very little news to report. One of the few items is that Stedmond is keen to print my Toronto speech in the summer issue of Queen’s Quarterly.

Dave Solway sent me his book of poems, and I think they are very good for a kid his age—honest, clear, tender, lyrical—he reminds me a good deal of Leonard Cohen, though he’s less complex than the latter.

Next week will be another busy one—Wednesday night I appear on a panel on the girlie magazines (I’m going to defend them), Friday night I speak at the formal opening of our new Faculty Club quarters, and Sunday night I give a talk at the Presbyterian Church here on "Poetry & Religion".

What a life! Well, keep your pecker up! That’s the one thing I really enjoy doing these days!

Love,
Des Pacey

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Dear Desmond,
No, I’m not dead, only snowed under an avalanche of work, and slowly, very slowly, digging myself out. My readings at St Lawrence University and Mount Allison put me way off my schedule. When I got back from Sackville I had three sets of exams to correct for the Ross High School—papers in Hist, Lit, and Comp, and you know how wicked and
long they can be. I haven’t got my neck above the snow yet, and it’ll be days and nights before I do. Luckily, I’ve a great helper in Aviva, who’s been pitching in and digging whole shovelfuls right beside me.

Both readings were very successful. At St Lawrence U I also made a speech: "Hamlet and the Beatniks" which went down very well with the natives. I spoke from notes, but the entire speech was taped. I’ve got the tapes now, and I’m thinking of working my talk into an article for TR or Canadian Literature.¹ There are some good things in it, some original reflections on American writing and Hamlet which ought to be given [to] the world. I can’t bear the thought of how poor the world would be without them!

Did you hear the Mount A panel on Censorship?² I didn’t have much opposition. The most exciting part, for me, came afterwards, when the audience began putting questions to the panelists. I was in good form that night, and if laughter could bury censorship then it was certainly buried that night.

The Sir George Williams farce--well, that’s the sort of thing I’ve run into all my life. Frye himself would piss on those pipsqueaks. It’s the hypocrisy that gets me so choleric. Do you know what the Univ pays me for nine hours of lecturing—and four courses, if you please!—less than $1800 per annum. How’s that for fine, upstanding, respectable Christian exploitation? Sir G Williams, as you know, is an offspring of the YMCA. I’ve been a parttime lecturer for more than a decade, and without any brag, I’m the most popular lecturer in the place. You ought to see for yourself the miracle I’ve worked this year with Commerce and Science students: my course in Literature and the Modern World: Camus, Tolstoi, Mann, Lawrence, Moravia, Gide, as well as the modern poets—Frost, Eliot, Yeats, etc. Given to a class of erstwhile dunderheads made properly impervious to literature by our accursed school system. Their thanks for saving them—and saved them I have—is the sweetest music in my ears, next to the sound of my own best lines.

Well, it was too good to be more than a dream. The head of the Eng department proposed that I be made a "Special Lecturer"—something like what MacLennan has at McGill.³ I’d have had no administrative duties, and it would have meant I’d be getting a decent salary for the same number of hours I’m teaching now. Because I don’t, since I have two homes to keep up, I’ve got to supplement my income by putting in fifteen hours per week at the Ross Prep School. That doesn’t leave me much leisure for writing, does it? And it isn’t just leisure I need, in which to write I mean, but that happy freedom in which the dream-work of the imagination can take place, can happen. So my only hope now is the Stock Market and a rise in property values. I’m sure there’s a profound irony in all this, but if so it has come to the right address: I’m an ironist myself, with a robust appreciation for the best—or worst—jokes the world
can play on me. It will always find me willing to trade jests.

Enough of myself, though. Don’t pay me back for my long, unavoidable silence with a silence of your own. My love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving


1See 410.15; unpublished.

2Panel discussion on censorship, Mount Allison University, CBC Radio, 24 March 1962.

3See 441.7.

April 5, 1962

Dear Irving,

Thanks a lot for your letter and poem of April 2. The poem is a very amusing squib—and makes me think that spring must be the mischief in Aviva and that you are losing your capacity to cope with her. If you ever need assistance, call on the Ginger Man of Fredericton!

If you think you are busy, you should try keeping up with me for a day or two. With essays to mark, thirty graduate theses to appraise, thirty oral examinations to chair, five committees to chair, and lectures to prepare & deliver, I am working each day from 8 to midnight with not a break of any kind. I don’t know how much longer I can keep it up—if I stay sane till I sail I should be lucky. Once I get out from under this load I don’t think I shall ever pick it up again—I am trying in effect to do three full-time jobs at once, & it just can’t be done without ruining one’s health.

I’m glad your two readings went so well. We heard your Mt A broadcast, and as you say you didn’t have much competition. Without you, it would have been deadly dull, with you it was just dull. Censorship is a lot of horseshit and everybody knows it—look at the hundreds of thousands of The Carpetbaggers all the housewives are buying in Dominion Stores. It’s nothing but an aphrodisiac, filled with fucking & sucking, and all the housewives read it & get in bed with their husbands with the cunt juice running down their thighs—and it’s wonderful for everybody!

Sir GW should be sued for slave labour practices!

Have I any news? Well, I go to Boston April 13–15 for a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship meeting, and as April 14 is Mary’s birthday I plan to take her along & we’ll have some fun—go to the galleries, a theatre, a night club etc.

Otherwise, I’ve been so busy I haven’t done or said an original thing in the last three weeks. A young Israeli
swimming instructor (of about 25 yrs--& very handsome) has developed a crush on Mary, which is good for her mid-forties morale, but I haven’t even that much consolation. I’m just an old fucked-out fuddy-duddy.

Love & kisses,
Des Pacey

1An allusion to J.P. Donleavy’s *The Ginger Man* which Layton had recently lent Pacey.


[s.c.]: "The Bishopric"

April 12, 1962
Dear Desmond,

It’s spring and I’ve been writing poems like mad. I hope you received "The Bishopric"¹ and liked it. Only a modern Elizabethan could have written it, certainly that last line: "into the sweet diocese of my body." I’ve written a biting poem called "Portrait of an English Prof"²—a colleague of mine posed for that one, the fellow I suspect who persuaded the selection committee to turn me down because I attacked Frye.³ The poem’s a minor classic, a satiric gem Catullus or Pope would have given his left testicle to have written. You’ll be seeing it along with about two other new poems in a group appearance in the *Canadian Forum*.⁴

I think my poem "One Too Many" eluded you. It wasn’t Aviva’s fidelity I was impugning, but her garrulity. When the time comes I need help from the "Ginger Man of Fredericton", I’ll quietly destroy myself by reading all your books from cover to cover. Why don’t you write pornography? I’d say you had quite a flair for it, judging by your description, vivid & unforgettable, of cunt-juice flowing down the thighs of passionate women. So spring has finally come to Fredericton! Why don’t you break loose and screw all the lovelies who’ve read about your critical acumen and your cock?

I suppose you’ve seen and read Colombo’s article on the Student Writer’s Conference.⁵ A typical Canadian performance, with Toronto stamped all over it. It raised my hackles, so I sat down and typed a vitriolic letter-to-the-editor which ought to appear in next month’s issue of the *Can Forum*.⁶ If that boy doesn’t end up with the editorship of a magazine or a publishing house, I’ll not only read all your books from cover to cover, but I’ll eat them as well. The stigmata are all there!

The holidays are not far off. I mean Easter. Next Thursday I’m free—FREE!—and I’m planning to motor down to New Hampshire, where I shall try to find a suitable cottage for the summer, and after that find a hotel to stay in for the ten days or so I have before the load is again deposited
on my back. Aviva has only five days holidaying, so she’ll join me when she can. I hope there are beautiful women at the hotel I select; I’m eager to read them your aphrodisiacal paragraph to test its effect. If it’s as powerfully persuasive as I suspect it is, you might want to take out a copyright. And afterwards, get Benjamin Britten\(^7\) to set it to music.

I’ve had a letter and a poem from Leonard Cohen.\(^8\) The poem’s no good, the letter rather depressed and depressing. Psychologically, I think he’s having a rough time of it. It’s damned hard to be a young poet! That’s why when I hear a lunatic like Frye saying that the creative and the academic are the same thing,\(^9\) I want to shout: “He should live so!” What does this sheltered fool know of the doubts, uncertainties and anguish of the unfinished poet who is still groping to get his foot on solid earth? Boy, get my puke-pail!

I think Cohen was upset at not winning the Gov Gen Medal.\(^10\) If you see Bailey,\(^11\) tell him from me to drop dead. There isn’t a single poem in the Finch book that won it. It’s dull, academic stuff with not one alive line that can even remotely be called poetry. **Exercises**, bloody, or rather bloodless exercises. What an arsehole of a country this is, where this sort of crap can win prizes, but Leonard’s genuine lyricism can’t and doesn’t. But why in the name of hell did Frye ask a pair of ailing sextagenarians to select the prize-winner? But, wait a minute! Isn’t Frye well into the ailing sixties himself? Sextagenarians of the world unite, you have nothing but your chilblains to lose.\(^12\) Well, I for one am disgusted.

It was good to see your article in the CF.\(^13\) Thank heaven for you; you make sense, man.

Aviva sends her love. Hugs & kisses for you & Mary.

Irving

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2. Layton, "Portrait of an English Prof (For H.M. Heichelheim)," *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* 65.

3. See 370.3.


7. Benjamin Britten (1913-76), leading British composer of the mid-twentieth century (also a pianist and conductor); his operettas include *Paul Bunyan* (1941, libretto by Auden), *Billy Budd* (1951), and his choral works include *Hymn to Saint Cecilia* (1942; text by Auden).
I predicted that:
1. You would win a Canada Council Fellowship.
2. a. F.R. Scott would win the Roncarelli case.¹
   b. Would win the Lady Chatterley case.²
3. Russia wd crush the Hungarian Revolution and then grant liberal reforms.
4. Kennedy would prove an able and energetic leader of the West, despite liberal and socialist blabermouths.
5. Castro’s days were numbered because he had betrayed (!!!) the revolution. Kindly re-read carefully my letters to you and my discussion of the course of the Cuban revolution and Castro’s part in it.

I once told you that I was never wrong about three things:
   a) People
   b) Politics
   c) Poetry
   
   So there! Yah!

Irving

¹In 1950 F.R. Scott won an important civil rights lawsuit for restauranteur Frank Roncarelli whose liquor license was removed unfairly by the Maurice Duplessis government because of his religious affiliations.

²In 1962 F.R. Scott successfully appealed before the Supreme Court of Canada the Quebec Superior Court decision to label D.H. Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover obscene.

Dear Irving,

As I was away in Boston from Friday to Sunday night, your letters of April 12 & 14 both reached me this morning. I enjoyed both of them—a very lovely pair of bouncing, juicy tits.

Yes, I liked "The Bishopric" poem very much. I should like to see some of the others you have written, but I can wait till they appear in the Forum if you wish. But I hope
you made clear that that poem about the English prof wasn’t about me! If there are any possible grounds for libel, I shall sue with great good pleasure.

I’m glad you think yourself capable of taking care of Aviva, as I’m kept pretty busy satisfying a very amorous woman of my own these days. We’ve quite often been on a three a day schedule lately, and if you can beat that after twenty-three years of marriage I’d like to see the evidence. We’ve never felt as amorous as we have the last few weeks—not even on our honeymoon. Mary is such a terrific bed partner that I have nothing left for those other hypothetical lovely ladies you hypothesize. We’re able to work this three a day bit because for the first time all the children are off to school—so each day after lunch we have what we periphrastically describe as a "twenty minute nap" and we both find it does wonders for us—such a wonderful feeling of relaxation! Of course some days I am just too busy with meetings etc to take the "nap", but we’ve managed it more than 50% of the time.

I’m glad you liked my bit about cunt juice down the thighs. I think I would make a good pornographer—another shy pornographer, I suppose. Maybe I’ll try it one of these days—it would be fun to see what one could do in that line.

Yes, I read Colombo’s article on the Creative Writing Conference. I was rather pleased with what he said about my speech, but surprised by what he said about our "unexpected" alliance & filibustering on the panel. In what sense was there a filibuster? And why should our alliance against the mythologizers be unexpected? And the students, with one or two exceptions, were not hostile but friendly towards you. I felt we had the mass of them with us against Frye, didn’t you? Well, the article was typical of Colombo’s present stance—an impossible one of straddling with feet in all camps. He wants everybody to think highly of him—a need I too did suffer from & still do to some extent—but sooner or later he’ll learn that you have to choose your enemies.

Have you a carbon of your letter to the editor? I’d like to read it.

So you’re off to the States next Thursday! Well, Mary & I are just back from the States but we’re going back for Easter weekend & taking the six kids with us. We’ve been promising them a trip to Boston at Easter for months, so are going ahead with it even though Mary & I unexpectedly got down there this weekend. We had a bang-up time there, too.

We left here in Mary’s little red Austin on Friday morning about 8:15, and got into Boston that evening about 6:30. That evening after dinner we went to see the movie West Side Story, anxious to see why it won so many Oscars. Well, we’re still anxious! The movie is dull, pretentious, muddled. Next day, Saturday, I was busy with my meeting of the Woodrow Wilson fellowship committee till 3:30 or so in the afternoon, & during that time Mary went through the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. When we got together again, we went to see a very good (& very sexy) French movie—Les
Liaisons Dangereuse!³ Wow! Talk about cunt juice down the thighs! Then dinner--& out to Symphony Hall to hear the Boston Symphony--& what a terrific orchestra that is. We drove back yesterday--through a blizzard of wet snow!

Sorry to hear of Leonard's state of mind. Of course he should have won the GG--& I told Bailey so & he practically spat in my face. Bailey says Cohen hasn't written a poem yet! But you know those fellows aren't in their sixties--Daniells is 59, Bailey is 57, and Frye is only 50! But they are older than their age.

Well, you win---about Castro. I guess he has betrayed the revolution.

And you win about Kennedy. He certainly scored a triumph re the steel price hike.⁴

However, I don't pretend to know anything about politics. My specialty is pricks & cunts. What I don't know on that subject is not worth knowing. So you can have your politics, & I'll have my sex!

Love & kisses for Aviva only.

From the old ginger man himself

Dessie Piecy

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¹Pacey was surprised by Colombo's comment:

The panel discussion was filibustered by an unexpected alliance of Irving Layton and Dr. Pacey. The other members, Jay Macpherson and Pierre Eliot Trudeau, were almost wolves crying in the wilderness. Another point was that there were signs that Mr. Layton was out of sympathy with segments of his audience. He was accused, for instance, by delegates from York University and the University of Toronto of permitting his television personality to interfere with his poetry and social message. Sparks flew and an excellent short poem of recent vintage was read to disprove these charges. The less-urban students seemed to be a bit shy of the prophetic Mr. Layton, but also a bit wary. After this there was lunch and a roundtable discussion with Dr. Pacey and Mr. Layton taking on all comers. (15)


⁴The US Steel Corporation--the largest steel producer in America--announced on April 10 a general increase in its prices to consumers for the first time since 1958; this move was followed by similar price hikes by the other principal steel-producing companies. Kennedy expressed shock and anger at the price increases at a press conference on April 11; on April 12 Robert Kennedy, the Attorney-General authorized a Grand Jury investigation into the increases; on April 26 a Federal Grand Jury indicted four steel companies on charges of conspiring to fix prices and prices were rolled back.

[s.c.]: ts "Androgyne," "I Heard a Madman" (published as "Crazy Jack"), "I'd Rather You Didn't Mention Him" (published as "Thanatos"), and "History as a Slice of Ham," Balls for a One-Armed Juggler 13, 52, 39, 25.
April 28, 1962

Dear Ginger Man,

The Easter respite from all good works is over and I’m back again in harness. I returned last night to find huge stacks of term papers and exam books covering the floor of my den and bursting out of chairs and desk. Aviva did the [in]vigilating for me during my absence, so I was able to get a couple more days added to my reprieve. The weather was god-awful. It rained, snowed, sleeted. If I hadn’t seen the sun before, I’d never have believed such a thing existed. My friend Bill¹ and I stayed indoors in our rented cottage, talked endlessly, smoked our pipes, and drank superb Bourbon and cognac. The time went quickly enough, that’s for sure. I wrote several poems, got ideas for many others.

May 2, 1962

The ideas became poems! O what a life! Here I am buried under hundreds of term papers and exams, and the muse pulls me out of bed at 4am to write a poem when I’m dog-tired and need the rest. Once a poem gets hold of me, it won’t leave me alone. There was a word, a single word, in "I’d Rather You Didn’t Mention Him"² which wasn’t quite right. Yesterday I got back from the Prep School where I teach, intending to get on with my correspondence, corrections, etc. Well, I no sooner sat down at the desk when a familiar drumming voice began to nag at me till I had to put aside what I was doing and take up the poem to eject the unsuitable word. I was at it for more than six hours! Precious time I needed for other things. But the poem was so tight rhythmically, and so organic by this time, that the word simply had to be the right one. Finally, I found I had to switch a line in order to get the word in that would do. And almost immediately after, another line popped into my head, the beginning of a new poem, which also kept at me until I sat down and wrote it. It’s a good thing called "Political Economy".³ The fact is, with the coming of warm weather (!) I’ve been writing like a fury, and I must have written about a dozen poems in less than three weeks. Wilson also liked "The Bishopric", one of the few occasions when the two of you have liked the same poem. He’s taken it for The Can Forum. Did I send you "Androgyne"?⁴ If I did, please change the archaic "nay" to "no" in the first line of the last stanza. It’s a poem John Donne or one of the other metaphysicals might have written—if they were me! It’s a brilliant poem on the possessiveness of love, and says something about it that the romantics chose to ignore. More and more, I grow dissatisfied with the poems I read: they appear irrelevant and inconsequential. Compared to the novelists and playwrights, the contemporary poets are simply nowhere; still blabbermouthing about "Love" and "Death", etc, etc and in the same old vein. They don’t say a helluva lot that’s new. For the greater part, they’ve remained stuck fast in Christianity (Eliot, Auden, Thomas) or if they break away from that swamp, go on to mouth ridiculous
puerilities about "Art" and "Tragic Visions" and "Social Credit". They're pre-Freudian, and pre-Marxian; and unlike their European contemporaries, have not assimilated Nietzsche. Most of the stuff written today in the English-speaking world is adolescent drivel. There's no reason whatever why any intelligent man or woman should spend more than a minute scanning it. I'd like to write poems that a surgeon or an attorney-general could read and appreciate. Poems that come out of the lives and emotions of contemporary persons. To hell with "literature" and with the "literary sensibility", and all the academic palaver and head-shaking that goes on in the name of "culture" or "poetry". What I really want is a blend of realism and imagination, an enhancement of the actual, and by the latter I don't mean the dried-out, emasculated version of it that pedants entertain in their timorous brains.

Well, I'd better stop here or I'll write you a manifesto.

Birney has asked me to give a course in "Creative Writing" at [the] Univ of BC. He says it might be for keeps. He has an idea of making UBC the creative centre in Canada. I might take the post.

To date I've 50 poems for my new book. And the summer hasn't begun yet! Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

1Bill Goodwin; see 288.3.


5Birney was head of the committee on creative writing courses in the Department of English at UBC.

432.

May 10, 1962

Dear Irving,

I seem to have misplaced your most recent letter, which is shocking I know. It's probably in one of my other jackets--I know I shoved it in my pocket to take it home to show Mary.

I hope you’ll forgive me for not having written sooner. We have been having our final examinations. In addition to setting & marking my own English exams, I have been conducting oral examinations for the PhD, MA, & MSc candidates in the School of Graduate Studies, & indeed I still have several of those to do. Then of course this is the time of the academic year when every committee under the sun has to have a meeting--so I've been on the full tear.
Do any interesting bits of news emerge from the chaos of work? Well, the CBC has accepted another of my short stories—"The Odour of Incense,"¹ which appeared in Picnic. And Creative Writing in Canada is to be reviewed this coming Sunday on Critically Speaking.² I don’t urge you to listen, as I have a feeling the review won’t be any good. I’ve never heard of the reviewer—one Joseph Gould³—and I suspect he won’t know what he’s talking about.

Eli Mandel has written the review of Creative Writing for the Fiddlehead.⁴ He does a beautiful job of fence-sitting: he avoids offending you, me, or Frye by tossing little bouquets to each of us while at the same time gently slapping my wrist. That boy is going to have to choose his enemies soon.

Did anyone send you a literary magazine from Queen’s, containing several sketches of the Creative Writing Conference by the two Queen’s delegates?⁵ Very patronizing—they accused me of being your servile ally & suggested that my eloquence in talking about a non-existent Canadian culture must mean that I have some connection with a revealed religion. Those two young men had obviously been Fryed, which is disappointing since they are at Queen’s & might be expected to have escaped the frying pan.

Well, I must get back to work. I shall be going to the Royal Society meetings in Hamilton for about a week from June 3 on, but whether I shall be able to stop over in Montreal I don’t yet know.

Raymond Souster (& wife)⁶ arrive here on Tuesday morning for a reading that afternoon.⁷ I believe he’ll be calling on you in Montreal en route.

All the best,

Love,

Des Pacey

¹Desmond Pacey, "The Odour of Incense," Stories with John Drainie CBC Radio, 1 May 1963.


³Unidentified.

⁴Eli Mandel, rev. of Creative Writing in Canada Fiddlehead 53 (summer 1962): 61-64.

⁵Quarry 1.1 (May 1962).

⁶Rosalia Lena (Geralde) Souster (b. 1924).

⁷Raymond Souster, poetry reading, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, 15 May 1962.

May 19, 1962

Dear Desmond,

Stedmond of QQ has taken "Androgyne", seems very enthusiastic about it. I’ve made several small changes in
it, chiefly in the removal of its somewhat archaic flavour. It still remains a good 17th C poem, of the kind Donne might have written. I thought I had sent you a copy of it, but if I haven’t you’ll be seeing it soon (I hope) in the QQ. Milton Wilson has three poems of mine which he’s running in next month’s Can Forum. I may have sent you copies of those, or you may have seen them when you were here. Do these titles sound familiar? "The Well-Wrought Urn"; "Merlin Perverse"; "The Bishopric". I think I sent you a copy of the last one. Yes, I did, and you said you liked it.

Weaver has a couple of poems for a summer or autumn issue of Tamarack. Those, or some of them anyhow, I’ve not been able to place in either TR or Can Forum, I’ve given to Cataract, which will be out in a couple of weeks.

Moscovitch is writing a longish essay, setting forth the "poetics" of the Cataract school. He’s going to take cracks at almost everybody and anything, and you’ll probably be one of the few people he’ll spare. He’s won a Woodrow Wilson scholarship to Columbia, and will be going there this autumn. He says he intends commuting between Hall Columbia and Princeton where Kaufman, a current favourite of his, is teaching philosophy. Lucky fellow. Not twenty-one, in good health, loved by [a] beautiful girl who adores him, author of two books of poems—what could be sweeter? The world’s really his oyster.

Birney has written me, to ask whether I’d be interested in a teaching post at UBC. He wants me to handle a creative writing course; has great plans to make Vancouver the creative centre of Canada. Robert Creeley will be teaching there too. At Birney’s suggestion, I wrote Roy Daniells and applied for an Assistant Professorship. If I get the job, I’d be giving the same courses there that I give at Sir GW and receiving about five times the salary. I’m weary of working for peanuts. I want leisure to write, and I don’t think the "academic" surroundings are going to deaden or paralyze me: I’m too old for that, too set in my rebellious ways. And if it does, tant pis! More even than writing, I do want to live fully and exuberantly the next ten or twenty years, travel, fuck all the beautiful girls I can, drink the choicest wines and meet all the worthwhile, interesting people. I’ve changed my views on a whole lot of things, expect to keep changing them. When I’m sixty I’d like to sum it all up in one single poem that will live forever.

Milton Acorn wrote me to say, in effect, that his muse has dried up, and he now wants to write a novel called The Poets. Since he intends to figure me prominently in it, he wanted my permission beforehand because he expects to say a whole lot of nasty things about me. I wrote back that I was extremely touched by such a display of "fairness" and told him to go right ahead and say all the vicious things his mind could invent. I did caution him on one thing, however. I advised him not to appear over-bright in his confrontations with me, or to appear to get the better of an argument since none of his readers would believe it! How's
that for deliberately poking up the fires? Like Whistler I have a genius for making enemies. But my way of doing this is different from his. I simply set about doing people favours and nothing so arouses fury and invective as being under a sense of obligation. I look forward with real zest to Acorn’s portrait, since I can think of no injuries I’ve ever done him, and of many good turns. But then, no good deed ever goes unpunished.

That’s very lovely news about your story. Someone in the CBC is at last becoming wise to you. About time, too. I hope you write a whole batch of stories this summer. They’re getting better and better. What are your plans for the summer? Are you and Mary taking a cottage somewhere? We’ve found a lovely cottage in the Eastern Townships at a place called Trouser Lake. (I wonder if the name has anything to do with the flies?) I shan’t be too far away from Smith, Scott, Gustafson, and Glassco. They’re all in the same neighbourhood. No telling what the proximity will do for my poetry this summer!

My friend’s calling for me to take me to the gym for my weekly workout. I’ve become quite a weight-lifter.

Love to Mary. Aviva sends her love to both.

Hugs,

Irv

enclosure: ts "The Fool’s Song," Balls for a One-Armed Juggler 105. :

1See 429.3.


5Walter Kaufmann (1921-80), Professor of Philosophy at Princeton (1950-80), author of Nietzsche (1950), Tragedy and Philosophy (1968), and editor of The Portable Nietzsche (1954).


7Robert Creeley taught in the English department at the University of British Columbia 1962-63.

8French: so much the worse.


The life of American artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834—1903), was marked by disputes with creditors, critics, patrons (such as Frederick Leyland) and fellow artists (such as Ruskin, whom he sued for libel); many of these disputes are recounted in his *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890).

Smith began teaching at American universities in 1930 but returned to spend the summers overlooking Lac Memphremagog; Scott spent his summers in nearby North Hatley beginning in 1942; Gustafson settled there in 1960 and Glassco had lived nearby in Foster in the Eastern townships since 1935.

May 31, 1962

Dear Irving,

I hope you are not hurt by my long silence. The reason for it is that I have been writing—after about four years of research and reading—my section of *The Literary History of Canada* on the novel since 1920.¹ I have just finished it—90 pages, written in the last ten days. As I have to keep checking dates, biographies etc as I go along, this is pretty good speed for this kind of writing. In fact I have given myself a bit of writer’s cramp, as you will see from the horrible handwriting of this letter. But the thing is good, man—even quite amusing in spots! For example, I present as "a document in Canadian literary history" the Canadian Bookman’s deadpan, pompous account of a dinner given by the city of Toronto in honour of Mazo de la Roche when she won the prize for *Jalna* in 1927²—and I say "Toronto, which has always yearned to be the literary centre of Canada, for once had some basis for the claim, and was determined to make the most of it."

Have you seen the *Times Lit Supp* of May 18? I haven’t seen it yet either (it should arrive today by sea-mail) but a friend in London writes that the issue devotes an editorial to me & my *Creative Writing*,³ praising the book (he says) but slapping me down for asserting that Canada has a cultural identity.

You’re certainly doing well with your poems. The last one—"Fool’s Song"⁴—is certainly different, but charming & clever in its way. It’s not your real manner though.

I know more about the UBC business than you’d suspect. Birney has no power to offer jobs to anyone, but quite frequently does so. Appointments at UBC are made slowly & only after about six committees have screened the candidates. You are in the screening process & I have been asked for a very very confidential assessment of you. And if they give you a job after what I’ve said about you I’ll eat my wife’s black panties!

I pass thru’ Mtl on my way to conferences in Hamilton this Sunday—but it’s only a 20 minute stopover at the airport. But coming back on *Thursday June 14* (get that date right) I have two hours between planes—4:20pm to 6:15pm. Meet me that day if you possibly can!
If you want to write to me about meeting me or about anything else between now & June 14, my address will be c/o Conference of Learned Societies McMaster University Hamilton, Ont. My love to yourself & Aviva! What about Norman Mailer5 & my former student, Lady Jean Campbell?6 Good or bad screwing?

Love,
Dessie


3"Canadian Writing," (rev. of Creative Writing in Canada by Desmond Pacey) Times Literary Supplement 18 May 1962: 357.


5See 414.9.

6Lady Jean Campbell, Lord Beaverbrook's granddaughter.

June 11, 1962
Dear Des,
The UBC is out! Daniells blocked the appointment. Birney has sent me a long, agonized, hilarious account of what happened,1 and it reads better than anything in Turvey.2 Rather than give you a garbled version of the entire, farcical mess, I'll enclose Birney's letter, after first swearing you to secrecy. Send it back to me, after you've shown it to Mary: it's the sort of thing I want to have by me in case I ever weaken in my attack on universities and the academic life.

As I told you, it was B who wrote me first and when I said I was interested in working with him, he advised me to apply to Daniells. I had no idea my application would so unnerve the poor fellow. I've always known there were brown-nosed shits in universities, but I never thought my toe would turn up so true a specimen as this. Ugh! Now, more than ever, am I convinced that a writer has no business being found within five miles of a university. Though the prospects are very good for getting an appointment next year at UBC, I'd turn it down even if a salary of $25,000 a year were attached to it. I've written Birney to tell him that.3 Do you want to know why? It's because of what his letter reveals about himself: to think that any writer should ever get himself into a position where things like this should seem important. Ha! If that's the sort of person D is, I'd want to be as far away from him as possible; shits like that offend my nostrils.
In fact, the whole thing smells bad. A writer is a free man, his university is the world. I shall never let myself be trapped—not by anything. If I ever weaken, I have only to think of Birney, Dudek, Smith, etc. No, thank you. No university is ever going to geld me, no Canada Council Fellowships, no titles and no honours. If you ever hear a rumour that I’m to be given the Lorne Pierce Medal for literature, I want you to scotch it at once. All these are proven means for taming the writer, for making him come to terms with his society and his civilization. And I say, and will always say, "To hell with both of them!" Between us, it’s war to the end.

You must have seen this month’s issue of the Can Forum.4 Doesn’t our bright young man get it in the neck? Serves him damn right. It was stupidly dishonest of Colombo to write the kind of article he did, and I’m glad to see that new voices are beginning to make themselves heard against the fence-straddling neutralism that passes for Olympian wisdom & serenity in this redolent rectum of a country.5 Someone should write a letter in reply to George Johnston’s5 pointing out how belated Frye’s discovery of my "genius" really was. Where was he before In the Midst of My Fever? Where was he when I wrote "De Bullion Street"; "Newsboy"8; "The Swimmer"9; "To A Very Old Woman"10; "Love the Conqueror Worm"11; "The Death of Moishe Lazarovitch"12 and many other of my early poems. I’m tempted to compile a list of Frye’s critical dicta concerning me and several others, and I might still do it, if no one else does. They’d explode once and for all the reputation he has for being a discerning critic: as I keep saying he’s not a critic, but a literary theorist and an educator. What my little toe knows about poetry, his entire brain can’t encompass. But go tell this to the dunderheads & asslickers of this country.

I doubt whether I shall be able to meet you at the airport. I shall very likely be in my summer dacha. Anyway, it never turns out well, does it? My book is going to be called: Balls For A One-Armed Juggler. How do you like it? It’ll be out before next Spring.

Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

enclosure: letter from Earle Birney to Layton [fugitive]

1Earle Birney, letter to Irving Layton, 4 June 1962, Layton Collection, Concordia University.

2See 102.1.

3Irving Layton, letter to Earle Birney, 11 June 1962, Birney Papers, Thomas Fisher Library, University of Toronto.

4See 429.5
Dear Des:

Disregard please my ungenerous remarks about Birney. I allowed some of my bitterness to spill over onto his head. He’s behaved very honorably in this entire affair: not many people would offer to resign over a matter of principle, and he has. He certainly put up a terrific battle on my behalf, and that too is a lot more than I can say about others nearer home. I still feel that a writer has no business getting himself into an absurd position where he has to worry about mediocrities and eunuchs like Daniells, but that’s another story and should not be used to detract from the very fine role he has played throughout this affair. It’s because I think I may have allowed my immediate reaction to Daniells’ sneakiness to speak unjustly or unfairly about Birney that I am writing you this letter.

Have you seen his new book? There are some poems in it that make me very envious. I especially liked "The Bear on the Delhi Road", "Pachucan Miners", and "State of Sonora". They’re better than anything else he’s done previously, always excepting his "David". Of course it’s a pretty thin volume, considering it represents ten years’ work. Still, let there be nothing but praise for a man who writes poetry after the age of fifty.

Shall I throw Daniells to the lines?

Love,

Irving

enclosure: ts letter to Roy Daniells, June 14, 1962

1Earle Birney, Ice Cod Bell or Stone (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1962).


5 See 100.1.

437.

June 18, 1962

Dear Irving,

What a pity you did not turn up to meet me at the airport last Thursday! If you had, I might have prevented you from committing the dreadful blunder of writing that horrible letter to Roy Daniells. That is an awful letter for you to write to any human being, especially to so humane and sensitive a person as Roy Daniells. I do hope you will write to him at once & apologize.

I despair of being able to explain all this to you in a letter. I knew you were in for trouble as soon as you said "Birney has offered me a job"—for, as I think I told you, B has no authority to offer anybody a job. How would I feel if I heard that Galloway or Cogswell had offered someone a job here? That is the head's prerogative, & he must exercise it with a view to all sorts of considerations—the balance of the department in terms of age, background, training, field of specialization etc etc. If all the people I have turned down over the years wrote me angry letters of abuse, I should be inundated with insults! I have turned down many of the best men in Canada, including Neil Compton, George Whalley, Bill Blissett,1 M.W. Steinberg,2 George Ellenbogan, & Sheila Watson3 (just to name a few) because at the time they applied they didn't seem to fit into my plans for the department. A head, if he is to be a true head, must make these decisions, often painful ones, & he must protect the confidence of those who write testimonials.

Roy wrote me a perfectly proper note4 saying in effect "Layton is an applicant for a post here. Please write me a confidential letter of recommendation." This is routine—and I did so. I wouldn't mind you seeing my letter,5 for I praised you as a poet, teacher & person—but I can see that Roy would not dare to betray my confidence by showing the letter to all & sundry. Roy knew I was a good friend of yours, so Birney's sly suggestion that Daniells sought out your enemies is obviously false.

You've got yourself caught in a Birney-Daniells feud that has its roots in the fact that Birney wanted the headship Roy got. Birney's advocacy of you hurt rather than helped your cause. Birney's letters to you merely confirm his disloyalty to his head, & I'm surprised you didn't twig to that fact.

For God's sake pull yourself out of this mess before you ruin the peace of mind of a man who is as fine a human being as I know—Roy Daniells.6

Sincerely & sorrrily,

Des Pacey
1William Blissett (b. 1921), Professor of English, University of Saskatchewan (1950–60); University of Toronto (1965–83); Professor Emeritus (83–); editor, University of Toronto Quarterly (1965–76); author of The Long Conversation: A Memoir of David Jones (1981).


3Sheila Watson (b. 1909), author of one novel (The Double Hook 1959) and five short stories (Five Stories 1984), teacher and a founder of White Pelican.

4Roy Daniells, letter to Desmond Pacey, undated (early May 1962), Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

5Desmond Pacey, letter to Roy Daniells, 14 May 1962, Daniells Papers, University of British Columbia Library.

6Pacey met Daniells in 1934 when Pacey was beginning his undergraduate career at the University of Toronto and Daniells was teaching at Victoria College (1934–37).

June 20, 1962

Dear Des,

Just a note for now to reassure you.

Though the letter I sent D was more moderate than the one you rec'd, I have written him an apology and should have done so without your prodding.

I think, however, you ARE misjudging Birney's motives. He wanted me to teach at the Univ of BC because he was Chairman of the CW dept and thought I'd be a good man to have working with him. My appointment, therefore, would have been no skin off Daniells, while it would have strengthened Birney's department. If, as you suggest, Birney's desire to have me was reason enough for D to oppose the appointment, then it places D in an even worse light, since it made him behave outrageously to a poet. I'm NOT Neil Compton, etc: I'm Irving Layton and I will be treated differently.

Because you've been a Head yourself, you naturally see the matter from a somewhat different perspective from myself or Birney. There's no point in telling ME I don't fit in with the Head's plans. If I don't, so much the worse for him; there must be something terribly wrong with him. I say this to you quite calmly, for there was never anyone so sure of his inner health and rightness as I am. This is not conceit, though you mistake it for such.

The entire experience has convinced me that I'm just not cut out for the academic life. I'm too innocent for it, if you know what I mean: not Jesuitical enough. I speak, write, and act like a poet; that is, without much premeditation or concern about the consequences. Thank heaven, I've amassed enough wealth, I no longer need worry about my tongue slashing my backside.
Still, thanks for your wise counsel, and for being so patient with me. You’re a wonderful, wonderful friend.

Love,
Irving


June 23, 1962
Dear Desmond,

Did you ever read Lawrence’s letter to Katherine Mansfield, excoriating her and her "foul tubercles"? Or some of his other letters? Or Byron’s? No excuse for my own intemperate letter to Daniells, but it serves as a warning to you not to judge writers by everyday standards. We’re more trigger-tempered than others, with very large areas of irrationality, sheer madness. And we write as we speak, with very little forethought. And damn the consequences!

Still, when you slough off the cruder sentences of my letter, all that I’ve said is that Daniells behaved like a louse. I’ll die thinking so. Your conventionality sticks out a mile long, and shows itself in that eloquent defence you make of the Head’s prerogative. I was really moved when you told me how he must labour to maintain the balance in his Department, weighing carefully imponderables as "age, background, training, field of specialization, etc, etc." Poor, poor Head! I never knew he had so difficult a life, and I am grateful to you for affording me an awestruck peek into it.

But several irreverent questions pop into my mind. What subject are we talking about? Law? Engineering? Accountancy? No, it’s English Literature; Poetry. And I am the fellow who writes it. Where would the Heads of the English Departments be if "worms" like myself stopped producing the stuff, very often out of anguished innards; though of course our lives cannot be equated for difficulty and hardship with that of the hard-pressed Head of an Eng department about to go into his awe-inspiring balancing act. No, of course, they can’t. Forgive me for mentioning this in the same breath. Don’t you think Daniells behaved like a louse? Here I am according to your own testimony, this country’s leading poet, refused a position, though my application has the warm support of another distinguished poet as well as that of his entire staff in Creative Writing. Moreover, I am not only a good poet, but I am also recommended by colleagues who’ve worked with me for the past twelve years as a very gifted teacher, conscientious, hard-working, and concerned. What possible reason could Daniells
have for turning me down; I mean, one that would bear the
light of day? And don’t start blabbing about balancing
acts--save that for your colleagues!

This is the world. A genuine poet gets slapped--once,
twice--and when he protests against the humiliation of it,
is reproved for doing so by someone who writes a book called
Creative Writing in Canada. Tell me, my good friend, would
you have a book like that if there weren’t mad people like
myself around so that you could write about them? The
answer is obvious, isn’t it? If it isn’t, then take down
your book and re-read the passage you wrote on Daniells.
Not very much, is it? You could hardly put together a book
from such brief snippets, could you?

It seems to me you’ve got to re-learn your first
principles--that is, if you ever knew them. Without poets,
the whole edifice of Headships, promotions, appointments,
etc, etc, with the breath-taking balancing acts that go on
in its ancient courtyards, dissolves into nothing but
professorial bad breath. Poetry has nothing to do with the
academic courtesies so dear to your conventional mind. I’ve
tried for years to tell you that. Every now and then you
manifest a gleam of understanding, but the spark soon goes
out, and you give me the same dazed, incomprehending stare.

All my life I’ve had to fight people like Daniells.
Shall I give you a brief rundown? I was expelled from Baron
Byng High School, two months before the matriculation exams.
I was almost thrown out of college. I was kicked out of the
Hebrew Orphan’s Home because I was the only supervisor who
tried to help the victimized children. I was kicked out of
Herzliah High School, after teaching there for fifteen
years. I was fired from innumerable jobs because I tried to
organize the employees. I was even discharged from the
Army. Now if you were a silly worldling you’d say there
must be something terribly the matter with anyone with such
a consistent run of misfortunes. Yes, there probably is—in
others. As I wrote you in my last letter, there’s never
been anyone with a stronger sense of his own inner health
and rightness. These things have happened to me because all
my life I’ve hated the soulless mediocrities whom evil gods
have put in charge of things down here. It was foredoomed,
don’t you see now, that both Sir George Williams and Roy
Daniells would slap my face, while professing the greatest
love for poetry, even my own. But I am one poet who’ll
speak up against the swindling liars. That I’ll swear to.

Affectionately,
Irving

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1D.H. Lawrence, letter to Katherine Mansfield, 6 February 1920, The Letters of D.H.

2See 172.2.

3Layton received an honourable discharge from the Canadian Army (with which he had served
eleven months) on 12 June 1943.
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your two letters of June 21 and June 23. I despair of ever making this situation clear to you in letters, & I do wish we could be together & have a good talk.

Your letters make it clear that you do not really understand the UBC situation. You speak of Birney being head of the creative writing department, when there is no such department. Within a dept you often have sub-committees to look after specific courses--curriculum, exam setting etc--but these committees have no power to make or even (usually) to recommend appointments. But Birney resents Daniells' headship, & I gather, tries in every way he can to embarrass him. (I clipped my lilac hedge on Saturday & my wrists are so stiff I can hardly write!) What do you suppose I'd feel like if Galloway offered James Reaney, say, a job here--& then kept pestering me day after day to see if I had hired him yet? Wouldn't I be less, rather than more, apt to hire him?

I honestly do not know why Daniells did not hire you, but I still think it's his prerogative to refuse any application, & without being blasted for doing so. I'd guess that Daniells was guilty of timidity--& fear of controversy. But that he is not guilty of anything more sinister than that I am sure. I have known Roy since 1934 & have never seen him do anything shady or mean in all that time!

You can't have it both ways. You can't be the daimonic man attacking academicism & yet be yourself an academic. You don't belong in a Canadian university--you'd feel smothered there! I'm not defending our universities--they are timid, conventional, conformist. I've had to compromise many times--but I'm not a daimonic man, merely a critic with some slight creative talent. You are a great poet--so why have truck or trade with the academy?

What you say about being too "innocent" for academic life is in a sense quite true. Unfortunately, it is true that there are all kinds of intrigues in every Canadian university I have knowledge of. Because I happen to like & be friendly with both Birney & Daniells, I have tried to remain as ignorant as possible of their UBC feud. But feud it is, & you were innocently caught in its crossfire.

I hasten to say that, as I can understand Daniells' reaction, so can I understand yours. You were asked to apply by someone (Birney) who purported to have authority, you applied & were turned down; naturally you are hurt & bewildered. A lesser man--me, for example--would have wept & prayed & whimpered; you, being you, charged to the attack. But was the citadel one you really wished to occupy, & would you really have been happy in it? If not, why not save your charge for a position that you really care about?

You are very sarcastic at my expense (about my talk of balancing a dept etc), but I'm not sure that the sarcasm is

June 25, 1962
fair. There is such a thing—not a great thing, perhaps, but not an entirely petty thing either—as building a university dept—and building it for the future. I turned down several good men in their forties because there are four of us here in our forties now, & only one in his twenties. My need at the moment is for some young man who will be ready to take over twenty years from now when Galloway & I & Cogswell are ready to step down. Is that so silly? You speak bluntly to me, so I’ll speak bluntly to you. The teaching of literature & the writing of poetry are different things, & not necessarily linked. You write good poetry, & I happen to know that you’re a good teacher. But on paper, you don’t have the credentials expected of the members of an English dept—you have no honours degree in English, no MA in English, no PhD in English. I don’t think this is very relevant in your case—but I mention it to temper your arrogance slightly & to suggest that you pause & ask "is it really so remarkable that my application is turned down?"

What a rotten mess! I’d have done anything to save you from this blow to your pride. I haven’t made myself clear in this letter—it’s merely a discontinuous series of jottings by the way. I think UBC would have been lucky to get you, & that Roy was mistaken in being afraid of your belligerence, but I do think you were (in the long run) lucky not to get involved in an academic department. You are a free man—why slip on your own chains?

Love,
Des Pacey

Dear Desmond,

Thank you for your understanding letter. I felt a whole lot better after I had read it. It was kind and sensible and full of warm humanity. It was also imaginative. But why tell you these things? You wrote it!

When I was in Toronto about a week ago, Kilbourn (Firebrand) offered me a teaching post at York, which I turned down with a promptitude that puzzled as much as it surprised him. His wife, it so happened, was the dame I called "hyperthyroid" in my Can_Forum letter. She’s an attractive young woman, intelligent too, whom you’d never think to look at was the mother of five children. She was on the Fighting Words panel with me; so was Morley Callaghan. I had coffee (Sunday in Toronto) with Morley, and he reminisced beautifully about the great Paris days when he was boxing with Hemingway, and hobnobbing with Fitzgerald and Joyce. He’s publishing a book about those days, Scribners is, and he expects it to be out this
autumn. Morley is a simple, unaffected man, very warm, but also very hurt and mistrustful; anyway, anxious about the fame that has been thrust upon him and whether he’s living up to the responsibilities he has to it. He kept on assuring me that in all the days & nights he spent with the afore-mentioned literary greats, he never once heard them say a brilliant or unusual thing. He’s a dear kind soul and I warmed to him: like myself, he knows that writing is made out of emotions, not ideas, and therefore kicks against the same pricks as I do: he’s even madder at the profs and critics than I am, and he’s just as bemused and unintelligible.

He drove me afterwards to the Kilbourns who, it turned out, lived in his neighbourhood; had recently moved into it, in fact. I spent two hours with the K’s, and we got on famously. I had the mss of Balls For A One-Armed Juggler, and they were delighted when I offered to read from it some of my new poems. Nobody has ever listened so raptly, so appreciatively to my work. They especially liked "The Bishopric"; "Baudelaire In A Summer Cottage"; "Androgyne"; "The Fool’s Song" and "The Cage". If everyone responds this well, the book’s success is a certainty.

Still, I turned down his offer of a position at York. And I did so with such conviction that Kilbourn became almost envious of my freedom and independence. Desmond, Desmond, I don’t really want to get into a university and academia. You’ve got me quite wrong if you think that I do, or that my recent actions are inconsistent with the professions you’ve heard me make from time to time. Let me explain. Neil Compton, the Head of the Eng Dept at Sir George Williams, put my name down (unbidden by me) for the post of "special lecturer", because he’s got it on his conscience that Sir GW has been exploiting me for the past twelve years, and he wanted to do the decent thing. Do you know what that exploitation comes to? I give four courses, teach nine hrs per week, and for this receive $8.00 per hr, the total adding up to the munificent sum of $1,500 per annum. Throw in the fact, that by common consent, I’m the most popular lecturer in the joint, with all my classes "over-subscribed", and you can see the damnable injustice of their refusal to give me the "special lectureship"; which would only have meant paying me a reasonable salary for the work I now do for peanuts. MacLennan has such a position at McGill; it involves no administrative work, and he’s not really a part of the university. If I had something like that at Sir George Williams, I’d not need to teach at Ross Prep School; it would leave me free to write. Do you see why I grit my teeth when anyone in this country mentions "poetry" to me? The hypocrites, the damnable frauds. Well, Marx made the bourgeoisie remember his carbuncles. I shan’t leave this country without something to remember me by. Eight dollars per hour! And young twerps being taken on staff each year. What an arsehole of a country!
I like to pit myself against its inhabitants as though to find out how stupid, how fraudulent, how hypocritical they can be. By now I’m an old hand at the game. And by now I’m really invulnerable, spiritually and economically. When I spit into their eyes, Desmond, I do so for all the poets, for all the gifted and tender who’ve had to eat the bread of humiliation from the fat-assed prostituted many: the cowards, the lunkheads, the well-heeled philistines, the spiteful dullards whom wealth has given the upper hand over those least able to defend themselves. I am a dangerous man, a madman if you wish, because I think I have been chosen by Time and Fate to avenge all the indignities they ever suffered: the suicide of Chatterton, the pauper’s grave of Mozart, the madness of Holderlin. I’d say this is the strongest feeling I have: it colours almost everything I write and think. It’s the clue to my short stories, and to many of my poems.

Do you see why I reacted so violently against Daniells? I was not trying to enter academia! Birney wanted me for his Creative Writing section, and led me to think I’d be doing much the same sort of thing I’m now doing at Sir GW—but at five times the salary. On top of that I’d have about five months of leisure—think of all the poems and stories I could write. You know, don’t you, that in the past I’ve had to hold down five and six teaching jobs, working 30 and 35 [hours] per week (not counting paperwork and preparation). This past year I cut it down to 24 hrs per week of lecturing and teaching. Well, what do you think of this country that keeps its best poet slaving away as I do—has kept him slaving away for nearly 20 years? O my friend, have I a lovely speech all prepared when I’m finally offered a Lorne Pierce Medal or some other such trinket!

Don’t misunderstand me. In all I’ve written you there isn’t a single word of self-pity. There’s anger, yes, lots of it. And bitterness. But of both I make depth charges for my flatulent compatriots; I expect to make bigger and better ones as time goes by. I have an old and long-standing account to settle with them, with the entire world of philistia, in fact. No, there’s no danger of my growing "soft"; I always make sure I run into a demonstration of the usual human vileness, and I hope to experience it as long as I live so that I may never forget the face of my enemy or his address. On his side, I must confess, he never runs away from me, but on the contrary rushes forward boldly to meet me. Can it be, he doesn’t know how hideous he looks?

To change the subject. I’ve sent Maxie to Big Sur to be with his mother and sister. I haven’t seen my daughter for two years, and the letters I receive from her are infrequent. Her mother has done an excellent job of weaning her away from me. She had no right, not legally, and certainly not morally, to take her away from Montreal. I could have them extradited, but what’s the use. The girl wouldn’t understand, by now her mind has been so poisoned she’d think I meant her harm and not her welfare. Though
I’ve pleaded with Betty to send her to me for the summer holidays, she pays no attention to my pleas. You’d think the woman would at least do it out of gratefulness for seeing Maxie each summer (entirely at my cost). But no. And the world believes me a terrible monster who left a devoted, affectionate wife, etc etc. If it only knew the real story...What an ass the world is! To be a poet is really to see it in all its incredible asininity. Really, I’m amazed that poets have not retched more: how could they have contained themselves, have been so patient and courteous? So fawning and sycophantic? Air, air...I’m going to puke.

Hugs,
Irving

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2Mary Elizabeth (Sawyer) Kilbourn (b. 1926), art critic for the Toronto Star and Canadian Art, author of Great Canadian Paintings (1967).

3"When several months ago a hyperthyroidal female with a side interest in my sexual virility wrote a dishonest account in the Canadian Forum of the views I had expressed at the Canadian Arts Conference, I let it pass."

4Fighting Words CBC Television, 1 July 1962.

5Callaghan spent the summer and autumn of 1929 in Paris associating with Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Joyce.


7MacLennan had been a part-time lecturer at McGill since 1951, becoming a full-time faculty member in 1964.

8Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) took arsenic in his Holborn garret and died at 17; Wolfgang Mozart (1756-91) died in debt and was buried in a pauper’s grave; Friedrich Holderlin (1770-1843), the German lyric poet, went mad in 1805 and passed the last 36 years of his life insane.

9Irving Layton has not been awarded the Lorne Pierce Medal.

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442. c/o R Cousens RR 1,
Eastman, Que
July 8, 1962

Dear Desmond,

Don’t take my ranting and paranoia too seriously; I come by them honestly enough, having got both from my mother.

Actually, I love this country, and would never think of leaving it for another. Two years ago when I was in San Francisco, I was offered a teaching job at an attractive
salary, I turned it down; and afterwards when I saw W.C. Williams, he told me he'd get me one at Rutgers or some such place, and I turned down his offer too. On the whole it's been an excellent life here; I regret very little, and would change less. If I [had] had my daughter with me, I think I'd [have] been completely happy.

Few poets have been treated more kindly than I've been, both by the critics and the general public. Also, there are the two fellowships, and the Gov-Gen's medal and one thousand dollars that went with it. And though I have worked hard, it hasn't interfered too much with my creativity, probably fostered a great deal of it; and I have managed to save enough to give me independence and security.

I write you this to erase the impressions my other previous letters to you may have created in your mind. The last thing I'd wish to be thought is ungrateful. But I must let you into a writing secret of mine. If anyone is going to keep writing in this country, he MUST pretend every bush is an ogre, must exaggerate, distort, and blow everything up. If he doesn't, where's he going to find out for himself the emotions of anger, disgust, hate, contempt etc. I've no Napoleon III as Victor Hugo had. I must invent him in the first innocent mediocrity I meet, out of the first tentative and feeble hurts I'm offered. Nor have I the Russian backwardness and obscurantism Pushkin had to rail against. I must imagine them here in Canada. This country is so ordinary, and commonplace both in its virtues and vices, that unless I ventured on some such desperate strategy as this, I'd find myself doing what Reaney does—ie, expressing the emotions of a half-man, a child; or writing about Mexican miners like Birney, or going to sleep with the scholarly poets: Finch, and Smith.

In short, there's a method in my madness, and there always has been. But the madness is still there: and frequently, like Hamlet I cannot tell whether I'm "mad in craft" or simply mad. As I once wrote you, "Keep your eyes on the poems." They're what's truly genuine about me; of course, every poet is less than his poems, but the latter are his final vindication. Yeats knew this; it's what he was trying to tell us when he rambled on about his "Masks". Yet his masks are child's play—believe me—compared to mine; in final computation, the affectation of a literary man. I've had more genuine experiences than the lot of them put together; have dared & dared while they counselled and did nothing. Recall Yeats' treatment of Maud Gonne when she knocked on his door and asked for shelter and courage. Would I have turned her away?

I tell you all this because I love and trust you as I have few people in my life. You have the true "afflatus" in you, a very real understanding of that complex, twisted, and contradictory nature that makes the poet necessarily seek his directions by inductions, that dooms him to travel crabwise or to try his longest flights in the dark like the bat. Over the years I have come to know your sweetness and
to be guided by your judgement and humility. Your friendship for me has meant much more to me than I can ever put into words; perhaps one day I shall be able to express it in a poem. You may think me all kinds of a fool, but never doubt my loyalty or affection to you.

I'm writing poems like mad. Will send you some in my next letter to you. My love to Mary. Aviva sends her love to both.

Hugs,
Irv

PS I rec'd a nice note from Daniells. Well, thank heaven, it's all settled. Or is it?

1Williams practised medicine in Rutherford, New Jersey, throughout his life; it is possible he offered to help Layton find work at Rutgers in nearby New Brunswick, New Jersey, but it's more likely the offer was made with reference to Fairleigh Dickinson University, based in Teaneck but with a campus in Rutherford, as Layton states in 275; see 275.12.

2See 97.2 and 113.2 and 297.1.

3Victor Hugo (1802-85), French poet, novelist, dramatist and critic; as he grew aware of the dictatorial ambitions of Louis Napoleon, whom he had originally supported for the Presidency of the Republic, Hugo came out strongly against him and on July 17, 1851, before the National Assembly, made a speech whose closing lines--"Because we have had a Napoleon the Great, must we have a Napoleon the Little!"--resounded over two continents. After the coup d'état of December 1851, Hugo fled for his life to Belgium where he wrote Les Châtiments (1853), a Juvenalian invective which pilloried Louis Napoleon and the Empire.

4Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837), incurred the wrath of Tsarist authorities in the form of two periods of exile, secret observation by the police, and the censorship of Boris Godunov (1831) because of his progressive ideas.

5The persona of Reaney's poetry to date (The Red Heart 1949; A Suit of Nettles 1958; Twelve Letters to a Small Town 1962) is generally that of a child, with the occasional adult innocent for variety, as in "The Upper Canadian," or "The Autobiography of a Marionette."

6See 436.3.

7"Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't." William Shakespeare, Hamlet 2.2.206-07.

8"I essentially am not in madness,/ But mad in craft." William Shakespeare, Hamlet 3.4.171-72.

9In 270, October 24-31, 1959, Layton wrote to Pacey, "Keep your eyes on the ball, you silly old coot: 1) I still write poetry."

10See 238.1.


Dear Irving,

Thank you most sincerely for your two letters from Eastman. The first, not dated, arrived a few days ago; the second, postmarked July 9, arrived a few minutes ago. They are both excellent letters, & the second one especially gave me great pleasure, though also a a feeling of unworthiness. I mean that it pleased me greatly to have you say how good a friend I have been, but that it made me realize that I am not as good a friend as I ought to be--since, for example, I had not answered your former letter.

In your first letter it was very clear--painfully clear--that you were deeply hurt by the UBC business & by Betty's attitude concerning your daughter. I should have written at once to cheer you up, but various things intervened. For the Dominion Day weekend, on a sudden impulse, I took the family to PEI for a weekend on the beach--& we had a wonderful time & came back with deep tans. I got back Monday (July 2) evening, to find your letter along with a big pile of other mail. First thing next morning I had to go, as setter of the two provincial matriculation examinations in English, to a meeting of the markers of these papers, to advise them how to mark. Summer School also started that day, and I am giving two courses, one on the modern short story and one on Seventeenth Century poetry, so all that week I was running back & forth between my lectures & the examination meetings.

This week would have been more peaceful, since the markers are now into their stride, but yesterday Mary's mother & father & two of our teenage nieces arrived to stay with us (12 in the house) for the rest of the week--so I shall have to give some time to them.

I should tell you that the Paceys are really involved in this year's Summer School. Not only am I lecturing in two courses, I am also taking a course in oral French, to prepare me to bargain with "les filles de Paris"! Mary is taking the course in painting again, which brings her "up the hill" as we call it every day from 9 till 1. My eldest daughter, Mary Ann, is taking three courses in English, French, & Art.

I have had very little time for writing, but I have managed one new short story & must get at some others once our guests leave. Of course we are to some extent preoccupied by the imminence of our departure for England. We sail from Montreal on August 24, & with eight of us going the packing involved will be very extensive. We have bought two big trunks as a start, but I expect we shall need a couple more.

Now to allude to or comment on points in your letter. Glad you liked the Kilbourns. I met them for the first time in June, when I attended a cocktail party in their house at Dundas. I found that Mrs K & I are fellow graduates of Caledonia High School in Ontario--& I found both she & her husband to be highly intelligent & articulate human beings.
It’s odd but true (isn’t it?) that though one makes sweeping generalizations about the dullness etc etc of Canadian academics, almost all the lively Canadians one knows are members of university staffs! I found Mrs K a bit fat though—and not nearly as well preserved after five deliveries as is Mary after seven!

So you had the Callaghan reminisces! Frankly, that man repels me. As an egotist, he even excels Birney. Just think about this, will you? What young Canadian writer has ever either publicly or privately received an encouraging pat on the back from Morley C? And compare & contrast yourself in this regard! Such self-pity, such a pathetic pre-occupation with his own imagined slights! Fame thrust upon him? Balls!

Of course Sir GW exploits you—I’d go on working to have the inequity righted, but I’m convinced Montreal’s your milieu—no more flirting with UBC or what not!

But today’s letter is so fine, so humane, so full of insight! This is the true you speaking, even though (in part because!!) you say such undeservedly nice things about me. I only hope I may prove worthy of your trust & confidence.

Love,
Des

PS Am dying to see the new poems.

444. c/o R Cousens, RR 1, Eastman, Que
July 18, 1962

Dear Desmond,

This will have to be a brief letter. All my writing material has been used up, and this is the only decent, unscribbled page I can find. Aviva and I will be going into Magog sometime later in the afternoon, so I’ll be able to put in another big supply of stationery—as well as wines, cigars, and good English pipe tobacco. We’re driving in to Magog to see The Children’s Hour which is supposed to be a good film. Wednesday is the night I act the courtier to Aviva by taking her to an early show and supper afterwards. There are some excellent restaurants in this town. Both of us need cheering up today. She hasn’t heard from her publisher, Abelard & Schuman, about a batch of her stories which they’ve now had for longer than a year; this, despite the fact, she wrote them more than a week ago, asking for news about them. That’s her disappointment for today. Mine’s that I’ve not had a word from Maxie for nearly three weeks. He sent me a brief note when he arrived at Big Sur, and since then—silence. I worry that something may have happened to him, and when I get like this, I’m like a nervous old hen. Aviva has to hold my hand, and keep on reassuring me the boy’s all right, and all adolescents are that thoughtless and inconsiderate.
It’ll be three weeks this Saturday that we’ve been here. Aviva’s been reading, I writing, like mad. I hope you like the enclosed poems. There are several others that I think you’d like, but they’re too long to type. Two of them, especially good, are "The Predator"² and "The Architect".³ I find my poems are tending toward the dramatic-narrative, and that I find myself wanting to employ dialogue to express and resolve the conflicting feelings & ideas in me. Unless poets can win back some of the ground they’ve lost to the playwright and novelist it’s all up with them, I feel. "Ejaculations" are all that’s left to the poet, and that’s not good enough. The really interesting things about man & his world are being said by the novelist, by the playwright, not by the poet. Nor is a mess of beautiful words enough. There must be substance in them, the sense of lived experience. So much of contemporary poetry strikes me as being empty, meaningless "literary" drivel. You already know of my dissatisfaction with Yeats, Eliot, and Pound—those gentleman are much too "literary"—and what they have to say about life I find hilariously naive and irrelevant. Maybe they’re writing to inexperienced dons whose innocent minds can be stirred by their antics and "philosophies". I can only shake my head and say: what silly posturing, what abysmal ignorance of people—I mean, real people—what juvenile thoughts. Compared to Mann, Joyce, Conrad or Svevo, they’re like the blinking imbecile of my poem.⁴ Unless poets can say something meaningful to their contemporaries they had better shut up. And since this is the end of the page, I’d better too.

Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving


Dear Desmond, August 11, 1962

Though I wrote you more than three weeks ago and sent you several poems, I’ve had no word from you. I hope there’s nothing wrong and that it’s only the business of leavetaking that has kept you from writing. That your family and yourself are well...
This has been a glorious summer of writing. Yesterday I finished a long poem "Elegy for Marilyn Monroe" which I consider one of the best things I’ve ever done. Tam Rev has taken "The Imbecile" and another poem of which I think I sent you a copy: "Advice for Two Young Poets". But this summer, definitely, I’ve gone beyond anything I’ve ever done before; so far twenty-six poems all of which are going into Balls, etc.

McClelland is delighted with the love anthology and with the swinging "preface" I wrote for it. The book will be out October, latest in November. Aviva has also gotten word on her stories, and seen the readers’ reports on them. Abelard-Schuman want her to re-work about eight stories and have commissioned her to do a children’s book on Australia. Yes, this has been a great summer, marred only by the absence of letters from my favorite correspondent.

And O yes, FOLKWAYS is bringing out an LP of myself reading my poems. It’s timed for January, the same month as the appearance of Balls, etc.

Do write if you can. Love to Mary. Aviva embraces you as warmly as ever.

Hugs,
Irving


2 Layton, Advice for Two Young Poets," Balls for a One-Armed Juggler 104.


4 See 187.2.

446. August 13, 1962

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter & poems of July 18, and your card of August 11. I have neglected you shamefully this summer, and proffer my deep apologies. I have had your letter on my desk for weeks, hoping for an opportunity to answer it, but none has come. I have been hectically busy teaching my Summer School courses (which ended Saturday), and making preparations for our overseas trip. The latter task has taken much more time and effort than I anticipated, largely because I am taking my car & have had to secure all kinds of import permits, international driving licenses etc etc, & because I have had to make arrangements with a variety of school officials for the children’s education.

There have also been other incidental distractions: I was commissioned to do the article on Canadian literature for yet another American encyclopedia (I now hold a virtual monopoly of the field) & needed the money; we have had a series of visitors, including my wife’s father & step-mother & two of her nieces, Donald Creighton, Mason Wade, Miller
MacLure, Bill Morton 4 of Manitoba etc etc; people have been holding a series of farewell dinners & parties for us; & of course there is the whole house to prepare for our tenants & all our packing to do.

However, apart from the packing, which will occupy us pretty fully this week, our arrangements are now virtually complete. We plan to arrive in Montreal on the morning of August 23, & deliver our car to the ship. We stay in Montreal that day & night, & embark ourselves on the morning of the 24th. If you are likely to be in Montreal at that time, be sure & let us know.

We reach Southampton on August 31 and shall proceed at once to Cambridge, where our address will be 53 Victoria Park.

I am delighted to hear that you & Aviva are both doing so well with your writing. I liked the poems you sent me very much indeed, especially "The Imbecile", "If I Lie Still", and "Mixed Metaphors". I think you are probably right when you say that you are now doing better work than ever before.

I hope that by now you have had word from Maxie, & are reassured on that score.

I view the coming year with a mixture of hope & apprehension. I know I shall be very homesick for Fredericton in particular & Canada in general, & yet I feel that the contacts with new & different people will be good for me. It should give me some perspective on Canadian writing. I hope to do some writing & broadcasting over there to make our writers better known.

Do keep on writing to me—-I value your letters so highly, & have felt quite bereft lately without them. Your friendship over these last eight or so years has meant a tremendous amount to me, & I hope that the Atlantic will not be allowed to sever it.

Love to Aviva!

Yours as ever,
Des Pacey


3Donald Creighton (1902-79), Canadian historian and Professor of History at the University of Toronto, author of John A. Macdonald: The Young Politician (1952) and The Old Chieftain (1955).

4William Morton (1908-80), Canadian historian and Professor of History at the University of Manitoba and Trent, author of The Progressive Party in Canada (1950) and The Canadian Identity (1961).
583

September 17, 1962

Dear Desmond,

You know I sent you a telegram asking you to meet me at Murray's Restaurant: that was after I had tried to phone you and received no answer. That was on a Tuesday, two days before you were supposed to leave for Montreal. Oddly enough, the news I got on the telegram was that the receiver of it didn't know who the sender was and wanted more information. Are there two Paceys in Fredericton? If so, what a calamity!

Anyway, I motored into town, hoping to run into you in some brothel or low dive. When that failed to produce you, I went to the hotel on McGill College Avenue where you used to check in but I drew a blank there too. Since you weren't on the streets, or to be found in the bookstores I could only conclude you were buried under a mountain of prostitutes, and were having a last good fling on Canadian soil before embarking. Sobered by your patriotism, I returned to my cottage to meditate on entrances and exits.

By now you and Mary must be all settled. Have you a comfortable place? Have you found schools for your children? It must be a great adventure for them, and I expect Michael will celebrate it in immortal verse. What sort of research have you in mind for your stay in England? Let me know how you see the contemporary English writers. My impression for some time now has been that there isn't a helluva lot going on; that since the death of DT¹ the poetic pot in England hasn't even got a simmer to it. Have you met any of the poets?

I've had the best summer of writing in my life, writing more than forty poems, with about ten of them major pieces. Balls For A One-Armed Juggler will be out sometime in January next. It has eighty new poems, all of the writing I did from the beginning of last summer to the end of this. I've written a "Foreword"² to it. Yesterday, when I returned from a snatched week-end in the country, I found the Readers' report on the book waiting for me. It was so enthusiastic, it almost made me blush. They think it's the best thing I've done so far, and I wouldn't contradict them. Last week I was over at Frank Scott's place. Art Smith & his wife were there, and I was asked to read my new poems which by some coincidence I happened to have along with me. Well, Art has an unusual way of showing his enthusiasm for good writing: he begins to weep. He sobbed so loudly that he finally had to leave the room. Once before he paid me the same extraordinary compliment; that was when I was reading "A Tall Man Executes A Jig".³ This time, more appropriately, he wept over my "Elegy for Marilyn Monroe", which he afterwards declared was "the greatest poem written in this century," with Frank demurring mildly. And logically enough I thought that the century had another 38 years to run.

My anthology of Canadian love poems has also been received with vast excitement. The title for the book is
Love Where the Nights Are Long. I’ve written a "foreword" for that too under the rubric: "What Canadians Don’t Know About Love." I think it’s the best foreword I’ve ever written. Jack McClelland writes me that Maclean’s is doing an article on the book and quoting about half of it. Did I tell you Harold Town⁴ has done eight drawings for the book, and from the rumours I’ve ben getting they’re supposed to be fabulous. I think the book is going to make some kind of sensation, and as its handsome editor I expect the most outrageous propositions from immoral women. However, I’ve set up a Selection Committee to advise me on which women I may safely go to bed with, and those whom perforce I shall have to disappoint. By the way, how’s cold English mutton these days? Write me a good letter full of news. My warmest love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

1Dylan Thomas.
3See 380.
4Harold Town (b. 1924), Toronto painter, sculptor and printmaker, a founding member of the Painters Eleven group; he has painted several murals including one for the Toronto International Airport (1963).

53 Victoria Park,
Cambridge
September 21, 1962

Dear Irving,

Thank you very much for your letter of September 17, which arrived today.

So we had another of our frustrating non-meetings! Fate seems to deal us a dirty hand in such respects. I am terribly sorry that you had a fruitless trip to Montreal to meet me, but I assure you I was completely innocent in the matter. The first I heard of your telegram was a cryptic reference in a letter I received from a member of my department at UNB a week or so ago. He had been deputed to look after our cat for a day or two after our departure, & in this letter he said that there was a note on our door the afternoon we left to the effect that a telegram had been delivered. It was he who tried to identify the sender. What annoys me about the whole thing is to think that the CPR Telegraphs did not go to the trouble to get in touch with my secretary, who could certainly have told them how to get in touch with me in Montreal.

You apparently mistook the date of our departure. We left Fredericton about 11am on Tuesday, August 21—the day of your wire. The reason for this was that we had to load our car on the ship before 9 o’clock Thursday morning,
preparatory to boarding ship ourselves on the Friday morning. We reached Montreal Wednesday evening, & stayed, by prior invitation, from then until Friday morning with Wilf Smith, Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill and an old friend of mine (we were students together at both Toronto & Cambridge).

Well, that's all past history. I want to say before I forget that your letter today was one of the liveliest & most amusing you have ever written me—and that is saying something. I am delighted to hear of all the compliments you have been receiving on your poems & and your anthology of love poems. I should very much like to read your elegy for Marilyn Monroe—I am sure it is a very moving one.

You ask how we are settled in Cambridge etc. At the risk of boring you I’ll give you a quick run-down of our doings since leaving Montreal, though I warn you in advance that nothing very startling has happened yet. For one thing, I have met almost no one yet, because term here opens later than in Canada—about October 1—and most of the profs (or "dons" as they call them) are still away on holiday.

The ocean voyage was delightful—the sea was calm & the sun shining all the way, so Mary & I lounged in deckchairs on the sundeck all day, went to a movie in the early evening, & had drinks & dances in the lounge in the late evening. For the first time in my life, I did not miss a single meal in the diningroom, & I ate like a horse. And there were several people on board we knew—Jack Harris, an old college friend of mine, who was on his way to France to spend a year writing a novel; John Ripley, an old student of mine, who was returning to the Shakespeare Institute to complete his PhD thesis on the stage history of Julius Caesar; and Walter Baker, of UNB's Physics Dept, similarly on his way to a year’s sabbatical leave in England.

The one spot of trouble came at the time of debarkation. The Immigration officers on board were so overwhelmed with the eight Paceys that they somehow missed stamping my landing-card—so when, after queueing for about an hour, we tried to pass through the gangway the officials refused to let me off—and the children gaped in horror as I was shepherded back up to the top deck to wait my turn in Immigration all over again!

Our first view of England was a very lovely one—as we sailed up the Solent the sun was shining brilliantly, & the multicoloured yachts off Cowes glittered in the sunshine & their white sails against the blue water matched the white wings of the seagulls against the blue sky.

We were met at Southampton by Elfrida Hoyle, an old Cambridge friend of mine who teaches German & French at a girls' school near Portsmouth. To help us adjust to the unusual driving conditions (left hand of the road, narrow streets etc) she piloted us the first twenty miles—as far as Winchester where we stopped for dinner. After dinner we decided we should not miss the opportunity of seeing Winchester Cathedral, & I'm awfully glad we didn't. As we
arrived, in the early dusk, the verger was just opening the
doors of the Cathedral, & he then turned on the lights—so
that we had the thrill of seeing the whole cathedral’s
length gradually become visible as rank after rank the
lights went on. The cathedral is the longest in England, &
parts of it date back to the 7th Century. It has a
magnificent fan-vaulted ceiling, & contains the tombs of Jane
Austen & Izaak Walton & Samuel Wilberforce.

By the time we came out of the Cathedral it was dark &
we still had 120 miles to go to Cambridge over unfamiliar
roads. We started out bravely, Mary acting as map-reader.
We passed the Ascot race-course & through Great Windsor
Park, but around Windsor & Eton we found the map very
confusing & eventually decided (since it was now 10:30 & the
kids were getting very tired) to try to find a hotel for the
night. We were lucky at the first one we tried—the Royal
Hotel in Slough, one of the old “Trust Houses” which dates
back to the 17th Century. I see now why the novels of
Smollett, Sterne & Fielding involve so many scenes in which
gentlemen find themselves in ladies’ bedrooms by mistake:
the corridors of this hotel were a veritable maze, & once
you got out of your room it was almost impossible to get
back into it. Unfortunately, whenever I got into the wrong
room, it proved to be inhabited not by some glamorous,
amorous blonde bitch, but by one of the numerous Pacey
children! There was my whole life in epitome—the instincts
of a lecher & the role of devoted husband & father!

We reached Cambridge next day about noon, & found our
house here a bit on the small side but well-equipped and
nicely-situated. The street has a beautifully feminine
shape:

& as it is a court there is no through traffic & we are
very quiet. The children can play football & cricket on the
grass of the little park.

We have been here three weeks tomorrow. The first two
weeks were almost entirely occupied with making arrangements
for the children’s schooling. What a series of interviews
with education officials, headmasters & the wrong kind of
mistresses, teachers & preachers. But they’re all placed
now, more or less happily. Michael delighted me yesterday
by scoring the only goal in the first soccer game he ever
played in! He also wrote a very good poem which greatly
impressed his teacher.

It is good for us to have such a change of scene &
pace, but I know we shall be glad to get back to Canada.
The English are infuriating in their insularity: they lump
all North Americans together as "Americans", & gloat in
their fancied superiority. Their climate is cold, their
houses are chilly, their women are frigid & their smiles are
frozen. Their only redeeming grace is their capacity to
laugh at themselves—and that is why the person I am most
looking forward to meeting in Cambridge is Kingsley Amis.
I’ve been entertained to dinner in my old college—Trinity—once, & go again next Tuesday for a big reunion dinner. Some of the librarians surprised me by remembering me—after an interval of 22 years. I’ve had a chat on the phone with Leavis, & am to go for tea with him soon. And an old college friend has invited us all for Christmas in Wales—shades of Dylan Thomas!

I’m working full-time now in the University library—tracing the impact of Canada on the British imagination, & reading Herrick, Herbert, Donne & so on for my honours course on the 17th century. I have been invited to lecture on Can Lit at the University of Wales.

Love,

Des P

1Wilfred Smith (b. 1916), Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill (1949–63) and Director of the Islamic Institute there (52–63); Professor of World Religion (1964–73) and Professor of Comparative History of Religion at Harvard (1978–84), Professor Emeritus at Harvard (1984–present), author of Islam and Modern History (1957) and Faith and Belief (1979).

2Unidentified

3John Ripley (b. 1936), Professor of English at McGill University (1964–present), author of "Drama and Theatre" in the second edition of Literary History of Canada; editor of Parker and Beerbohm's The Seats of the Mighty (1986).


6The Solent is the main navigational channel from the Western part of the English Channel to the ports of Southhampton and Portsmouth.

7Elfrida (Hoyle) Swain (1917–77), teacher at Cosham School for Girls, Portsmouth.


9Ifor Enoch (b. 1914), author of Jesus in the Twentieth Century (1976), co-editor of The Welsh Bible (1988), Professor of Greek (1953–64) and Principal of the United Theological College (1964–78) at the University of Aberystwyth; Pacey’s close friend from their graduate days together at Cambridge.

449. October 12, 1962

Dear Desmond,

You can blame my long silence on Max. He was supposed to get back for school’s opening, Sept 4th, but didn’t until the end of the month. You can imagine the state of my nerves. No, you can’t, because I didn’t tell you that neither he nor Betty let me know where they were or what they were doing. About two weeks before Max was due to leave San Francisco, they decided to leave for Mexico, from
where, after a mysterious silence, I received a telegram from my son asking me to wire him sixty dollars so that he could take the bus back to Montreal. Of course I wired the money, and kept expecting him to ring the doorbell any day. Nothing of the kind happened. There was neither hide nor hair of him. Instead--silence. At this point I was pretty nervied up, thinking something must have happened to the bus he was riding on. Then I received a letter from Betty telling me she and her man (a chap named Price) had decided to push on to Guadalajara. About ten days afterwards, the CNR Telegraph phoned me just as I was sitting down to supper to ask if I’d accept a collect telegram. It was from Betty, asking me to wire at once one hundred dollars to Nogales, which is a border town between Mexico and the USA. Without touching my food, I drove to the downtown office of the CNR—the only one that’s open 24 hours—and sent the money to her. It seems they decided they’d be better off in Albuquerque, NM. Maxie was with them during all that time, taking in all the sights and adventures. After all, it was a lot more exciting than school. Luckily, he’s a bright student. He says he’s now practically caught up in most of his subjects, and I believe he has, for he’s been driving himself pretty hard since he returned.

But his adventures didn’t end with his return. The very next day he said he wanted to live in his own room, somewhere downtown. I saw when he came back bearded and corduroyed that he had matured, but I didn’t realize how much. Well, he wouldn’t be a Layton if he didn’t spring something like this on me. He wants his freedom, his independence. I didn’t try very hard to dissuade him, for I saw he must have been considering the matter for a long time. It’s a wise decision, actually. When it comes to family relationships, I’m a realist. If a son can grow up without disliking or hating his father, the latter has done an excellent job, I feel. I do want more, of course, and I expect to get it. I want his affection and confidence. I have those now, and it’s because I don’t want to lose them, that I’ve decided to slacken the reins and give him his head. Of course, I don’t want you to think I’ve just turned him loose to fend for himself. He’s going to receive seventy-five dollars each month from me for the next six years, as long as he continues studying. This is his last year at High School. He’s a good student, has an excellent mind, and is a lovable person. I don’t think he’ll get lost.

But now that I’ve three households to support, I’ve had to take on another job. In fact, I have three jobs, one for each household. I’m out three evenings during the week, and I teach five afternoons in the Prep School. My mornings are free, but I can’t do anything with them in the way of writing, since preparation for my lectures at Sir George Williams and Chambly County Protestant School Board (my third job), as well as correcting themes and examinations, takes up all that lovely free time. Ah, well. I console
myself with thinking about my forthcoming book and the lovely poems I have in it. Someday, I’ll have all the freedom and leisure I need. I’ve applied for a Guggenheim, and if I get it, I shall go to Europe for a year or two and work on another book of short stories or poems. After I’ve discharged my responsibilities I shall be able to take it easy. I could retire now if I wanted to live on a reduced standard, but Aviva is clamouring for a BABA, and I’d like to give her one. She’s a great woman, and I love her dearly. She’s the only woman, it seems to me, I could live with. Her book is appearing in January, the same month [as] my Balls For A One-Armed Juggler, so we’ll probably make a bang-up party to celebrate this unique event. Last night she finished a story about a great day in Australia which her publisher commissioned her to do. We’re both pleased with it, and I’m sure it’ll be accepted. Abelard-Schuman have also asked her to make a few changes in four other of her stories, with the assurance they will be accepted for publication when she sends them the revised copies. And tonight she had her first class in Italian at the Sir Thomas More Institute. And her first ballet, the night before. Three weeks from now, she’ll be giving a lecture on James’ "Beast in the Jungle"¹ to my Sir George Williams class—now grown to over 175 students from last year’s 35—in "Literature and the Modern World."

I should have said earlier that I enjoyed your letter immensely. It gave me a vivid picture of the "settling in". Don’t let the cold, the damp, and the frigid women get you down—well, anyway not the first two. I don’t wish to preach adultery to you, but you owe it to your country to show the English women what Canadians can do. Don’t let the memory of the war years die out! We’re still fondly remembered by the female part of the population, but unless men like yourself do your bit, our glorious accomplishments will be forgotten. Besides, do you know a more satisfactory way to stay warm?

I’m enclosing Maclean’s preview of my Anthology of Canadian love poems.² This ought to spur you on to even greater amatory heights—or should I say depths. The "preface" is actually about twice the length of the excerpted piece. I’m eager to have your opinion of the book, and I shall send you a copy as soon as I have one in my hand.

Wynne Francis has done, with a slight assist from me, an excellent paper on the Forties in Montreal, chiefly about First Statement and Preview. You’ll be seeing it in the Fall number of Canadian Literature.³ It’s a vivid re-creation of those faraway days.

Hope your family is well, and your research turning up nuggets of information in shovelfuls. All my love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving


2See enclosure.


450. 53 Victoria Park
Cambridge, England
October 24, 1962

Dear Irving,

I’ll write small in an effort to save postage—you see you’re not the only writer who is a penny-pincher! Although I still can’t believe that of you—you have always seemed to me the soul of generosity.

Well, thank you very much for your delightfully long & interesting letter of October 12 which arrived several days ago. I am terribly sorry to hear of the long worrying time you had over Maxie, but glad that he did finally get back safely. I hope having a room of his own suits him, & is not too much of a drain on your pocket-book. These teenaged rebellions are inevitable, but damned hard on the parents. I’m having it now from my two teenaged daughters (18 & 16)—& especially from the older one, who almost always opposes any plan I suggest, & who has several times refused to go on trips with us—just out of sheer cussedness. It’s a most peculiar love-hate relationship, especially between father & daughter.

Thanks for all the news re your books, Aviva’s manifold successes (with her figure & her touch, how could she fail?), & your Guggenheim application. I have written a glowing testimonial for you, & also a good one for Norman Levine. But you mention Europe. Don’t you realize that Canadians who get Guggenheim’s are required to work in the USA? I’m pretty sure that’s still the rule: a few years ago I applied for one to work in England & was turned down on that ground. So check it, if you’re in doubt.

I’m enjoying my stay here more & more all the time. At first there was so much organizing of one sort or another to do that I felt as responsible & burdened as at home—but now I’ve gradually realized that I am as free as a bird—that I don’t have to prepare lectures, or attend committee meetings, or mark essays—or even work in the library if I don’t want to. I do spend most of my days in the library, & have already made some quite fascinating discoveries—but when I feel like it I just go for a walk, or go to bed with my wife in the middle of the day, or go and watch a rugger game.

And, in true English fashion, all sorts of opportunities are now slowly opening up. I should have
known this, for it was my experience before, but the fact is that the English are not really cold but rather slow warmers-up! They don’t greet you the first day they meet you by saying, as we would, "Come round tonight & have a few drinks!" No, they nod politely, seem quite uninterested--& then two weeks later the postman brings a letter from them inviting you to dinner in two weeks’ time! And the dinner is excellent, the conversation lively--& you’re friends. Well, enough time has now elapsed for this process to have worked through to its conclusion, so Mary & I have been having a hectic round of social engagements & are rapidly acquiring a circle of friends. So far they are mainly academic people, but one of them is a Scottish poet called James Burns Singer\(^1\) whose wife (an American negress) is a brilliant doctor (child psychiatrist) & painter.\(^2\)

I can’t go away back to the time of my first letter to tell you all the news, for that would take too long, but just to give you an idea of the way our life is going I’ll touch the high-spots of the last two weeks. Two weeks ago Sunday we went to Leicester for the day to visit one of my rare English cousins: a lovely country house with two cars, one a Jaguar, martinis before lunch & two bottles of wine with it--really ritzy! Well, I can stand dipping my snout in the flesh-pots once in a while, although I’m always so afraid of the butler! The following Thursday Mary & I went to London by train for the day, mainly to see the gigantic Kokoschka Exhibition at the Tate.\(^3\) We spent over five hours in the Gallery, & found the paintings absolutely overpowering: what power, what freedom, what intensity. His people especially are haunting--so ugly & yet so human & so full of ferocity or cunning or (occasionally) tenderness. We had a brief chat with Sir John Rothenstein, the Director of the Tate, whom we had met last fall in Fredericton, & then went off to some of the smaller galleries & to see the satirical review Beyond the Fringe\(^4\)--funny, but not that funny.

The next night I was the guest of Professor Basil Willey\(^5\) at dinner at the high table in Pembroke College--was given the VIP treatment, seated on the right of the Master, & plied with vintage port till I was well fuddled! These Cambridge dons really have a great life--six or seven glasses of port with dinner every night etc etc!

Next night, Saturday, was our dinner at the Singers’, where Kingsley Amis was also supposed to appear--but didn’t (he was out of town for the weekend). However, this meant we got to know our hosts better--& they were fascinating. Like all poets, Singer was most happy reading his poems to us--& I guess we appeared interested, for he kept insisting that we stay longer & drink more & more wine--until finally his wife fell asleep & we had to leave! Doesn’t that sound familiar?

Last week was not quite so hectic: we saw a very good play (A Touch of the Poet by Eugene O’Neill\(^6\)) on Monday night, were guests at a cocktail party at Clare Cottage on
Thursday night, & I dined at the high table in Trinity on Saturday night. Incidentally--another example of the slow but sure English methods--I have just been accorded "dining rights" of an honorary fellow at Trinity, which means I can dine there free of charge twice a week! Sunday I drove the kids down to London for the day, & showed them the Zoo, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace, No 10 Downing Street, etc etc. We parked our car right in Trafalgar Square!—where it drew more attention, by the way, than Nelson's phallic column! Monday night we saw a truly marvellous Italian film—La Notte, directed by Antonioni—better if anything than La Dolce Vita, so do see it if you have a chance. And tomorrow night Mary & I go to Bishop's Stortford to dine with the chief editor of Blackie's & his wife. So you see it's a full life. I'm not getting any (creative) writing done, but I'm storing up impressions by the score. And Mary is getting a lot of painting done, & is learning sculpture at the College of Arts!

Love to you & A
Des

1James Burns Singer (1928-64), American-born Scottish-educated poet, author of Still and All (1957) and Collected Poems of Burns Singer (1970).

2Marie (Battle) Singer, child psychologist and artist.

3Kokoschka: a Retrospective Exhibition of paintings, drawings, lithographs, stage designs and books, organized by the Art Council of Great Britain, The Tate Gallery 14 Sept.-11 Nov. 1962.

4Fringe theatre developed from the many small companies that gathered around the main festival offerings at the Edinburgh Festival. The revue Beyond the Fringe was first seen in Edinburgh in 1960 before transferring to London.

5Basil Willey (1897-1978), Professor of English, Cambridge 1946-64; Honorary Fellow Pembroke College 1964; author of Coleridge on Imagination and Fancy (1946), and Spots of Time (1965).


7The Pacey's 1962 Ford Country Sedan station wagon featured three rows of seats.


10Bishop's Stortford is a residential urban district in East Hertford on the Stort river.

11David Bisacre, editor of Blackie's Publishing House.

Dear Desmond,

I simply don't get the point of your cryptic reference to my "generosity" and my "penny-pinching." What have I

November 8, 1962
done? Do enlighten me, for I shall stew in my curiosity until you do. A thought occurs to me...did I perchance put insufficient postage on the letter I sent you? Is that what you’re muttering about? If that isn’t it, I give up, and you’ll just have to explain the singular conjunction of the caress and the uppercut.

You are having a wonderful time. The account of your activities leaves me breathless. Thank you for being so vivid and full in your descriptions of them, for you make me feel I’m standing or sitting beside you all the time, and looking over your shoulder when you’re dining at the high table or visiting with your new friends. I’m glad you’re having such a good time and that Mary is with you to share in all the fun and games. You’ve worked damned hard for the year of relaxation and pleasure. No one more deserves it than you do.

La Notte hasn’t come here yet, and I shall certainly see it when it does. I liked La Dolce Vita very much, and helped everyone around me to understand what it was all about, and if you say the former is even better—well, it must be powerfully good. A Touch of the Poet has never played here either, though last year there was a production of O’Neill’s Long Day’s Journey Into Night. Though the acting and direction were both uninspired, the raw force of the play came through. This Saturday I’ll take Aviva to see the film version of it, being shown in one of the local theatres. About a month ago, we went to see The Last Playboy of the Western World. We just about walked out after the first five horrified minutes. The idiots had turned Synge’s play into a slapstick comedy and were playing it strictly for laughs. I could have cheerfully murdered the whole lot of them, and leaving their corpses strewn about the stage, have turned the thing into a Shakespearean tragedy. And these were The Irish Players, too, or so it was announced! Hah, a pack of drunkards and drabs, more likely.

And what think you now of my boy, Kennedy? Didn’t he handle the Cuban affair beautifully, like a true maestro? At the height of the crisis, when it looked as if the blockade he’d ordered was going to get us into a shooting war with the Russians, I was going to write to you to ask you to drop a big bird on the lib-lab blabbermouths, the Kingsley Martins, et al, that whole Nation & New Statesman group of anti-American crappers, but events have dropped one on them even larger than yours, were you disposed to drop one. Were you? Or were you also shivering behind your scruples and fears? Well, for the record, I want you to know I back J.F.K all the way. I knew the Russians wouldn’t fight over Cuba—any commonsensical person could figure that out for himself. I heard the great historic speech Kennedy made when he announced the measures he was taking to make Russians & Cubans put up or shut up. He was tremendous, speaking with great force and dignity. And now the results of the mid-term elections are in—another magnificent
victory for him. There ought to be no doubt in your mind now, as there never from the very beginning has been in my own, that Kennedy will go down in history as one of the greatest presidents of the USA—if not the greatest. At last the West has found the leader it has been searching for; the entire composition of forces has been altered by his bold, imaginative actions. And there’s still more to come. When he finally leaves office—six years from now—it will be a very different world from what it is today, a much safer and much freer world. Of that I’m certain. We are witnessing the historic dissolution of Communism as an ideological force. And good riddance.

Two weeks ago I gave a reading at the University of Alberta, Edmonton. It was one of the best readings I ever gave, and the response of the students was overwhelming. There must have been over five hundred of them in the auditorium. Eli Mandel introduced me as "a free man" and when it was all over, he kept muttering that it had been "an historic evening." I was feeling too good over the warmth and affection which the audience had displayed towards me—they interrupted my reading with applause again and again—to want to disagree with him. So officially it stands that this was "an historic evening." Afterwards there was a party at Eli’s place where I met Kreisel, and some of the local illuminati. The next day I flew to Calgary where I read to a small group at the Arts Centre, and from there I went to Vancouver to give a reading at the UBC. The response here was every bit as wild and enthusiastic as the one at the Univ of A. You would have thought I was a visiting prince, or one of Fawzia’s belly-dancers. I read from my forthcoming book Balls For A One-Armed Juggler as well as poems from Red Carpet. My friend, it was one of the great moments of my life. After, there was a luncheon at the Faculty Club given by Roy Daniells, who, however, was unable to attend. I never did get to see him. I met Phyllis Webb, Robert Creeley, George Bowering and about a dozen of the English Department. I’m enclosing The Ubyssy which gives an account of the interview I gave to two reporters. After the luncheon I wasn’t going to be bribed into silence. I still think, and will until my dying day, that Daniells was wholly at fault, and I do not take kindly to affronts given to poets and poetry. That I can do without the job is another story.

Keep on having a good time. Give Mary my love. Aviva is well and asks to be remembered.

Love,
Irving

3John Millington Synge, The Last Playboy of the Western World (Dublin: Maundel, 1912).
4The Irish Players are the touring troupe of the Abbey Theatre, home of the Irish National Dramatic Society, founded by Yeats, Lady Gregory et al; their first tour of North America took place in 1911.

5A grave international crisis arose in late October as a result of the establishment of Soviet missile bases in Cuba. In view of the threat presented to the US by these bases Kennedy announced on October 22 a US naval "quarantine" of Cuba with the aim of preventing military shipments from reaching that country. After a lengthy exchange of messages between Kruschev and Kennedy, and intensive mediation by UN Acting Secretary-General U Thant, the Soviet Union agreed to dismantle the missile bases under international supervision.

6Kingsley Martin (1897—69), editor of the New Statesman (1931-60); two months after his appointment as editor the Nation was amalgamated with the New Statesman to become the New Statesman and Nation; he greatly enlarged the weekly's circulation; its literary and political commentary was read keenly by the majority of British leftwing intellectuals.

7Irving Layton, poetry reading, University of Alberta, Calgary, 27 Oct. 1962.


452. November 20, 1962
Dear Ollying,

Thank you for your letter of November 8.

I'd better set your mind at rest about your "generosity" and "penny-pinching". I was trying to have a little joke at my own expense. I was conscious of the fact that I was using an airmail form, rather than a proper letter, in order to save 9 pence in stamps. That reminded me of the assertions made one night in your apartment, by Max & Aviva, that you were really a miser—about electricity, etc. That talk stuck in my mind because it was such a shock to me—because in your relations with me you have always been so completely generous. But you see you have shamed me, this time, into writing on regular letter-paper, & laying myself open to a postage bill of one whole shilling and threepence!

Which reminds me of one of my favourite stories about the late William Faulkner. At one time, you know, he was postmaster in the University of Mississippi. After a few months, he quit. When asked why, he replied "I was sick of being at the beck & call of every bastard with two cents to his name."

That in turn reminds me of a good story sent to me recently by a salty Newfoundland woman who is matron of the men's residences at UNB. It appears that one of Joey Smallwood's industries in Newf'd is a rubber factory. A few weeks ago an order reached the Canadian govt from Kruschev asking if Polymer of Sarnia could supply one thousand French safes 18" long. Sarnia couldn't—nor any factory on the mainland. As a last desperate chance, Ottawa called Joey.
"Sure," said Joey, "that’s easy. We have them in stock, stamped NEWFOUNDLAND MEDIUM."

Which boasting reminds me to ask you if you have seen the autumn issue of Queen’s Quarterly, which contains the text of that address you heard me read to the young writers in Toronto, & also a most flattering review of Creative Writing in C by Shrive of McMaster. He quotes me on you. But fancy his not seeing that I was being amused by the final bit about Richard II—when I make that reference, & I have several times in lectures, I always chuckle at its mock-pedantry.

I forget when I wrote to you last, so I don’t know where to begin with our news. You refer to La Notte, so I obviously wrote to you after October 22, when we saw that film. On Thursday Oct 25 Mary & I drove out to Bishop’s Stortford to have dinner at the house of David Bisacre, editor of Blackie’s, the publisher. He is interested in my children’s verse, and may bring out an English edition thereof. He’s a very fine fellow, whom I met one evening at a dinner in Trinity, of which he is also a graduate. Incidentally, that kind of contact counts much more over here than in Canada: there’s a terrific pull still in the old school tie. It’s one of many things that rub me the wrong way about the English, but I’ve made up my mind to enjoy the year & ignore the rubs as much as possible.

I should interject though, that what I most dislike about the English way of life is the lack of central heating. We’re bang in the middle of a cold spell here, & the bedrooms are like refrigerators. I believe, with all due respect sir, that even your vaunted sexual prowess would be adversely affected by getting between cold, wet sheets. No wonder the English women never have an orgasm—the heat of their husbands’ members is absorbed by the wet sheets! My rate per week has slipped from twenty-one to fourteen already! And the end is not in sight!

Mercifully, we had a house guest—an old girl-friend of mine—for the Cuban crisis weekend, and I was so preoccupied with her I hardly noticed the crisis. The mood of England was very anti-American—at first no one believed there were missiles in Cuba, & in any case they opposed the blockade. I thought Kennedy played his hand very cleverly, and I’m now inclined to agree with you that he is a great president. I’m glad to concede that you were in the right that time!

During that weekend we went for long walks along the Cam river, saw Shaw’s play Misalliance at the Arts Theatre (Shaw wears well!), and saw a French movie (a semi-documentary called Chronique d’Ete—intensely moving in spots, but a bit slow-moving—(but there’s one sequence where a woman teeters on the edge of hysteria that’s unforgettable).

The weekend of Nov 2 to 5 was terrific—we went to stay with relatives of mine who live where I lived as a boy—so I saw my old school, my childhood sweetheart, etc etc. The queerest sensation—almost all the people I met & places I
saw have appeared in various of my short stories, & it was like seeing one's imaginings come to life. Remember it is thirty-odd years since I saw any of those people or places, & I could hardly believe they really existed. The most affecting bit was when we stopped the car in the middle of the village where, from age 7 to 14, I lived with my grandmother in a little brick cottage. There was an old man who looked slightly familiar & I said "You don't remember me-I'm Desmond Pacey." "Oh," he said, "You must go & see Doreen. She's just come for the day & she'll love to see you!" To cut a long story short--he was Doreen's father, & Doreen was the girl I went with for the last three years I was in England, & who was the central character in the first short story I published, away back in 1936! Doreen & I looked deep into one another's eyes & I could tell she was thinking, as I certainly was, "wouldn't it be fun to go to bed together again after all these years & see whether it's as good as it used to be." I must make that experience into a story one of these days--if only one could capture the contrast between the correct conversation we actually had, & the surges of deep feeling going on behind the masks!

We got back from that trip on Tuesday Nov 6. The next day we saw Canada play the university here at rugby--& in spite of our loud & continuous cheering Canada lost 16 to 11. However, they put up one of the best games of their tour. Thursday morning I spent by invitation with the critic F.R. Leavis, who duplicated his performance of our first meeting twenty four years ago--two hours of solid parade of martyrdom. That evening I dined at Trinity, & sat beside the Master, the eminent biochemist Lord Adrian. Well, his lordship & I hit it off famously--so much so that at the end of the evening he asked for my home address, & a few days later an invitation arrived for dinner at the Master's Lodge on Dec 3.

On Saturday Nov 10 Mary & I were guests at a lunch in Selwyn College. The host was James Winny of the English dept here & the others there were also members of that dept. That night Mary & I had the Singers in for dinner--Singer is the Scottish poet & critic I told you about. (He reviewed Smith's Oxford Book for TLS, incidentally.) They are a very lively couple, his wife being a negro graduate of Smith who did her PhD under Anna Freud at London, & is now a child psychiatrist.

Well I won't bore you with all our other dates, except to mention one quite different one--a wine-tasting party last Friday night at Peterhouse. That was quite a gay affair--they had set out a series of seven different vintages of claret, & one sampled them in turn. By the time we got to the seventh, we were all a bit tiddly!

Sorry to be so egotistical--delighted to hear of the great success of your readings at Alberta & BC. I imagine poor old Roy felt that it wd be embarrassing to meet you after you'd published that satire about him.

As ever, Des
Dear Desmond,

I had better write you a letter, even a short one, or you'll think I'm dead or that I've murdered Aviva and run off to the other end of the world. There's nothing I enjoy more than receiving news from you—your last letter is delightfully gay and frank—and sitting down to write you news of myself. But the last three weeks have been very hectic ones. In fact, it seems to me that since my return to the city, I've been on a merry-go-round of work, readings, lectures, and parties arranged by McClelland and Stewart. The week before last I was in Toronto three times in something like six days, getting there by auto, train, and plane. I had to go there to sign with Harold Town the deluxe edition of Love Where the Nights Are Long and to appear at a cocktail party McClelland had made for the book's appearance. I got a note from Malcolm Ross letting me know he'd been present and hinting strongly that I'd actually seen him without recognizing him! It could well have happened. I had driven with Aviva from Montreal, spent the better part of three hours looking at my signature, drunk innumerable Martinis, and been blinded by TV camera lights. I couldn't have recognized my own mother had she returned from the grave and tossed off a Martini right in front of my eyes! The following evening we went to a small gathering Colombo had made for us, where I got into a silly argument—silly because my opponent was so—with a former editor of Canada Month. The fellow was so absurdly
reactionary in all his opinions & views, he condemned himself with every sentence he uttered. After a time, some of the others joined us, and the whole thing took on an appearance, less of a discussion than a baiting. At that point I left the poor fellow to his inherited misfortunes of brainlessness and fear; for the latter was the real source of his conservatism: a fear of women, change, and democracy.

In the middle of the week I went by train to be on the Pierre Berton Show. Harold Town was supposed to be on it with me, the two of us discussing Love Where, etc, and the sexual mores of Canadians. Because of a cold, he wasn’t able to make it. In his stead, came June Callwood, the lass who interviewed me for the Star Weekly. Together with Berton, we made up an interesting panel, though for the most part the arguments flew between Callwood and myself. It was a lively show, Ross Maclean, the producer, thinking it one of the best. Earlier I had been on another Pierre Berton show with Hugh Garner. His new novel deals with rooming-houses, so Maclean thought it would be a good idea to have us swap anecdotes and reminiscences about our experiences in rooming-houses. Garner was in hilarious good form, full of humour and wit, though Berton told me afterwards he had heard these same stories from him on other occasions. Maybe so, but the stories were still good, and the repartee certainly spontaneous and unrehearsed. Now I’m eager to read his novel, written he told me after a lapse of ten years from serious writing, and in less than eleven months.

Next month, Balls For A One-Armed Juggler will be out. I’m on pins and needles. Did I tell you I wrote a preface for it? I think it’s a good one, though the critics, including yourself, will take it as some more attitudinizing on my part. I don’t care. Nobody likes them except the public whose heartbeat I know because I’ve so often listened to it. My words echo people’s own fears, ideals and ambivalences and they do this because nobody spends more time than I do learning them. In my "office" at Murray’s—St. Catherine and Guy—there’s never a week passes that I do not meet with young poets, frustrated wives, students, businessmen, etc. I have only to dip my spoon! There are hundreds of stories waiting to be written or melted down into a single poem—or a single line. I can never over-estimate my debt to "Murray’s".

I’m enclosing another clipping at the risk of having you think me a greater egotist than I really am. Unfortunately, I haven’t got the farcical review to which I replied. No matter. You can infer from my letter and the other what a silly piece of irrelevancy it was. The whole town is talking about our exchange. Good. It’s about time someone set about to put these journalists in their place. How’s Mary? Is she enjoying the stay in England as much as you are? I hope so. Give her my love. Aviva sends hers to both of you. Write when you can.

Hugs, Irving
Dear Irving,

Your letter of December 16 reached us just before Christmas. I had just about given up on you. I don’t think you have ever been so slow in writing before. But you do seem to have been very busy, with all your signings, parties, TV interviews etc etc. Will success spoil Rock Hunter?¹

It has, I find, spoilt Kingsley Amis—or perhaps he was rotten to begin with. I spent several hours in his company—drinking whisky—two or three weeks ago, & have no great desire to see him again. He makes such remarks as "Saturday Evening Post offered me $2000 for a profile of Princess Radziwell.² $2000! I told my agent to turn the offer down contemptuously. God! They were paying Wodehouse more than that in the twenties."³ And "God, I’m glad the students have gone down. I have thirteen of them and I can’t get any work done when they’re around." And "I can’t stand Cambridge, I came here thinking I’d find an active intellectual life, but the dons are so stuffy & academic."

¹Malcolm Ross, letter to Irving Layton, 15 December 1962, Layton Papers, Concordia University.

²Pierre Berton (b. 1920), prolific popular historian, journalist and broadcaster, "Canada’s best-selling author."

³Pierre Berton Show, CBC Television, December 1962.


⁸Desmond Pacey, "The Young Writer and the Canadian Cultural Milieu," Queen’s Quarterly 378-90.

December 28, 1962
And he smokes elegant small cigars, takes snuff, blows his nose into a huge silk flowery handkerchief, and keeps glancing around the room to see how many people are watching him. He talks of his father in these terms, "I realized that I had no further interest in my father at the age of ten. It was not that he stopped me swearing, or drinking, or sleeping with women, or even that he was a drunk or a womanizer himself. He didn't even shove religion down my throat. But he was just stupid, I realized his stupidity at ten, & he hasn't made a single interesting remark since."

But you, who know the public heartbeat because you've put your delicate ear to its vulgar breast so often, will no doubt approve all the above as an expression of artistic self-trust. How can anyone so busy listening to the public heartbeat be expected to differentiate between the odour of the divine afflatus & the stink of ordinary smug conceit?

And please don't overestimate your debt to Murray's. Do you reckon in the tip?

Love & kisses,

Des

1 Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?, dir. Frank Tashlin, Twentieth Century Fox, 1957.

2 Princess Lee Radziwill (b 1933), socialite, Jackie Kennedy's younger sister, married Prince Stanislas Radziwill in March 1959.

3 P.G. Wodehouse (1881—1975), prolific and popular British novelist, short story writer and playwright, author of The Inimitable Jeeves (1923) and Right Ho, Jeeves (1934); twenty-one of his novels appeared in the Saturday Evening Post.

January 11, 1963

Dear Desmond,

No, success won't change this boy, but it's keeping him awfully busy. More letters from cranks, phone-calls, hopeful enquiries from would-be poets. It would amaze you to see the amount of humanity that passes through my doors. Currently I have three "sons"—bewildered young men whom I'm teaching to fight and survive in a world that hates the slightest manifestation of joy & creativity. One of them is a giant, 6'3", who plays the viola, loves music & poetry, and has been crushed by a domineering mother and an unsympathetic father. John Grayson is his name. He came all the way from a small town in Northern Ontario to see me, having taken out A Red Carpet For The Sun from the local library. He was lost, having flunked his final year in High School, etc etc. Well, to cut the story short, he's registered in the Ross High School where I teach, and he seems to have found himself. I introduced him to Max, and to some of my other "sons", and he now seems to have found himself. I'll tell you about the others in my next letter.

Your description of Kingsley Amis is priceless. Don't fear my ever becoming like that. My vanity is nothing else but an expression of high spirits. I like throwing myself
into everything, just as some children like the sensation of falling freely in the air. But the fires of poetry are what I’m here to tend, and love and friendship are my admitted "bellows".

News: Dalhousie University has asked me to give a reading before a student assembly sometime next month. There’s a good chance mine & Cohen’s play, "A Man Was Killed," is going to be staged in Montreal very shortly. Love Where The Nights Are Long is selling as if it were a new Sermon on the Mount and I the Messiah. I’ll send you a copy of it along with Balls etc when I get the latter which should be any day now. Aviva is well; so is Max. And so am I. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

1 As Layton has helped numerous young writers over the years, he no longer recalls who the other two "sons" he refers to were.

2 Unidentified.

3 Irving Layton, poetry reading, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 9 February 1963.

4 See 342.3.

January 19, 1963
Dear Irving,

I was pleased to get your letter of January 11. I’m glad you weren’t offended by my previous letter. It’s awfully hard to know when one is being honest, and I really don’t know whether my frequent concern about your being ‘spoiled’ is a genuine concern, or mere envy of your present eminence. Probably there is some of the latter, anyway. But at least I think I can be sure of my honesty in saying that I am much more interested in your letters when you tell what you are thinking, feeling, and creating than when you tell me about your cocktail parties with Jack McClelland. I also think I am being honest in saying that I believe the latter gentleman is exploiting you for his own monetary gain. There is something vulgar & phoney about Love...Long and its Harold Town illustrations & limited signed edition and its general air of "look how shocking I’m being!" By the way, much too late, I’ve thought of the ideal title for that anthology: Canadian Lays (after the late Victorian anthology, Canadian Poems & Lays.)

Well, our year is slipping away quickly--five months of the twelve gone already. The rest of the time is going to slide like an avalanche. Most of April we plan to be on the Continent--Paris, the French Riviera, the Italian Riviera, & if there’s time, trips to Florence & Rome. Then almost all of July I shall be involved in the Conference of Universities of the Commonwealth--first at Edinburgh, then at Oxford, then at London. We expect to sail for Montreal
about August 21. So for working in the library there are only left the months of February & March, & May & June. And what a vast amount of work I have to get through in that time. But I’m enjoying reading everything I can find that the British have written about Canada from the beginning to the present--& learning a lot about both Canada & the British in the process.

We continue to get a great many invitations, but I won’t bother you with a catalogue of our dinners etc. The British are in an interesting if somewhat pathetic phase at the present, totally unsure of their destiny & struggling hard to keep up some kind of front. Their best & one really redeeming quality is their readiness to laugh at their own pomposities.

Love to Max & Aviva.

As ever,

Des


January 28, 1963

Dear Desmond,

Leonard Cohen’s in town, looking much thinner than when I last saw him nearly two years ago, but otherwise unchanged from the charming, complex, anguished friend I’ve always known. He arrived in Montreal, fresh from a triumph in New York where he sold his novel to Viking Press.¹ They gave him a thousand dollars advance besides fêting him in a way that made him think he was Thomas Wolfe and Fitzgerald combined in one. He’s also nearly completed another book of poems, to be called, Flowers for Hitler,² and plans to send the mss to McClelland & Stewart. I don’t think he’ll remain long in Montreal. He’s got a purchased villa on the island of YDRA and a lovely Norwegian blonde to soothe his restlessness. He’s also at work on some short stories as well as another novel. That boy is going to make it one day...or cut his throat. He does write a beautiful prose, and when it came to selecting poems for my love anthology I had to keep myself from selecting more than the five of his I did lest I be accused by the disgruntled shades of other poets of partiality. It’s now a quarter to three, and I’m expecting him to be here shortly for supper.

Balls For A One-Armed Juggler is ready for distribution to the stores. My author’s copies ought to be here early this week, and I’ll send you a copy of it and of Love Where the Nights Are Long as soon as I receive them. I wonder what you’ll think of the "Forewords" I’ve written for each of them. Balls, etc, I consider my best book to date. It makes the completest statement of my vision, and with an economy and passion I only rarely managed in my earlier
poems. McClelland & Stewart are publishing my collected poems in 1965.¹ That leaves me two summers in which to write out the newer feelings & attitudes I feel burgeoning inside me. If I’m given a Google, I’ll live in Europe the next two years and write, write, write. I want to make the coming decade the most productive and significant in my writing career. To hell with fame, reputation, etc! All the noise is pleasant, of course; but quite irrelevant. Finally, and always, we write because we have to, and for no other damned reason.

Love,
Irving


458. February 6, 1963
Dear Irving,
Thank you for your letter of January 28. It is very good news about Leonard Cohen’s novel. And I shall be looking forward to getting your Balls for a One-Armed Juggler.
You still talk about living in Europe on a Guggenheim—when I told you that’s out! Seriously, they’ll cancel the thing as they did mine when they found out I planned to go to England (some ten years ago). At least check with them first.
Did I tell you that I’m also supporting Norman Levine for a Guggenheim? I hope you both get them.¹
Louis Macneice (whose poetry I admired greatly in the ’thirties) is to give a lecture here on February 28,² & I am to have dinner with him after the lecture. And I’m to meet Stephen Spender in London in the near future. Of course both of these men are spent forces now, but they once meant a lot to my thinking, & it will be fun to chat with them.
Did you see the editorial devoted to me in the autumn number of Canadian Literature? That’s the first time I’ve been the subject of an editorial³ in Canada apart from Fredericton! And I’ve had a lot of letters about my article in QQ (the Toronto speech you heard)—apparently a lot of people found its ideas quite exciting.
We’ve now pretty well settled our plans for April on the continent. We cross from Dover to Boulogne on April 6, spend three days in Paris, three days driving down to the south coast, a week in a villa on the French Riviera, a week driving down to Rome & back, & cross from Boulogne to Dover on April 28.
And we’ve also settled our return journey to Canada——
shall be arriving in Montreal via the Corinthia on August
28. Will you still be there then?
What do you think will happen to Diefenbaker? He’s
chosen the best possible issue——American interference——but I
still think he’ll lose. But I don’t feel that Pearson is
much better.
Have seen some excellent foreign films & some good
plays, & am getting a lot done at the library. Weather’s
awful, though!

Des

1Neither Layton nor Levine was awarded Guggenheim grants.
2Louis Macneice delivered the 1963 Clark lectures at Cambridge on parable (just six months
before he died); they were published as Varieties of Parable (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1965).
3George Woodcock, "Cautious Inevitability," editorial, Canadian Literature 14 (autumn
4Parliament was dissolved on February 6 following the defeat of Diefenbaker’s government on
a vote of no confidence the day before over the Liberal’s criticisms of his defence policy,
especially the reluctance to store nuclear warheads on Canadian soil because of Canada’s
participation in the Geneva disarmament conference; Pearson and his Liberals won the election on
April 8.

459. March 3, 1963
Dear Desmond,

Excuse, please, the long silence. Though I haven’t
written, you’ve been in my mind. Lots of things have
happened——I’ve been in one fray after another——readings at
Dalhousie and Ottawa——intestinal flu——Aviva’s pregnancy——
that had you been here I’d have talked your ears off.
Two weeks ago I was being denounced as a Nazi
apologist. Old friends wouldn’t talk to me. The enclosed
clippings will explain why. After Dr Rowse’s2 speech I sent
off the first letter to the Editor.3 That did it. I had
the whole city by the ears. My own people were ready to
murder me. Germans phoned to thank me with tears in their
voice. It was all very emotional.

What benighted creatures people are!
You speak a word of truth and compassion and they’re
ready to hang and quarter you. Well, I stick to my guns and
keep giving. Though sad, it was high comedy too. All sorts
of people wrote letters denouncing me, questioning my
competence as a historian——also my sanity. I let them howl;
what else have ordinary folk to do when one sticks a pin
into their prejudices? Then I wrote my second letter.
After that——silence! My case is unanswerable. Even the
critics saw that.
The same time I was fighting on another front. Walter
O’Hearn4 had "reviewed" my Balls, etc.5 It was about as
dishonest a review as I’ve ever seen anywhere. Of course he
has every reason to despise me: I called him a scribbling mediocrity. I’ve less and less patience with those who stand in the way of poetry—hack writers and English profs. I’m determined to push them aside, because in this country they’re a real danger to creativity. I smell the Frye influence everywhere. The great man was at Sir George Williams to give a lecture on "Education Today", or something like that. I never heard such pretentious balderdash in all my life! Is this the man who’s reputed to have the finest intellect in Canada? But people can’t be serious when they say that. The address I heard was the closest thing to what a half-baked sophomore could make.

But there I go again. But then I’ve seen Frye’s influence at first hand, I mean on the professorial pipsqueaks who’ve found themselves comfortable cocoon-space in the colleges and universities across the land. If they’re not smoked out they’ll spread their slime and white filaments everywhere. Lately the newspapers have made it their policy to give books of verse to these same English profs for reviewing. I’m enclosing the latest sample of what we’re getting. Unless these moralizing pricks are stopped dead in their tracks, they can do a great deal of harm. I hate the bastards.

I’ve written one of the nastiest letters of my life. The Montreal Star will probably publish it Tuesday or Wednesday. Mr Brian Robinson will learn that even mumbling inanities in a classroom can be called dangerous living. Or rather, taking them out of the classroom and putting them into print. I tell you, from now on I’m going to be merciless with that breed. As for Frye I’m just waiting for a chance to cross swords with him and then let heaven help him. As long as I’m around I’m going to make damn certain that no one ever confuses a poet with an English prof and that poets are treated with respect. I think Dr Daniells knows that by now.

What an arsehole of a country!
When I put my nose too close to it I want to throw up!
Luckily that sensitive organ of mine is presently stuffed with a cold.

Aviva & embryo send their love.

Hugs,

Irving

1Irving Layton, poetry reading, Ottawa, March 1963.

2A.L. Rowe (b. 1903), British historian, Professor of History at Oxford, Fellow of All Souls’ from 1925-74; author of The Spirit of English History (1943) and William Shakespeare: A Biography (1963). Rowe was the Beatty Memorial Lecturer at McGill in 1963 and received an Honorary degree from UNB in 1961.

3Irving Layton, "Accuses Dr. Rowe of Falsifying Record," letter Montreal Star 5 Feb. 1963:
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of March 3. Delighted to hear that you have finally managed to make Aviva pregnant—too long enough, didn’t it? I was beginning to think you (or rather she) needed a "strange interlude" with the prolific Pacey! Then you would have had proof that critics are creative!

You sound as if you’ve been shooting your mouth off too much as usual. I can’t blame you for arguing with Rowse however—he was at UNB for a month about eighteen months ago & I couldn’t stand his pomposity. Fellow of All Souls, no less! If he’s a brain, I’m a genius.

Your Balls arrived, & also the Love anthology. The former has some very fine poems, but, in all honesty, there’s a few I wish you hadn’t printed. However, I read a number of the good ones when I lectured on Can Lit here in Cambridge last Wednesday night, & the audience responded well. But I hope when you do your Collected Poems you’ll be really ruthless, excising all such trash as "This Machine Age", "Portrait of an English Prof" and "Epigram for Roy Daniells." As for the Love anthology, I don’t think it really lives up to your exaggerated claims in the foreword. There’s nothing in the book to approach the best love poems of the 17th C, and it’s sheer folly to pretend that there is.

So many things have happened since I wrote to you last that I can’t possibly tell you about them. In London I had long talks with the editors of the New Statesman & with Kingsley Martin. Here I’ve heard Macneice deliver tired Clark Lectures, & had dinner & drinks with him afterwards. He’s a tallish, horse-faced man, rather shy & inarticulate, but very knowledgeable. We’ve taken several weekend trips to see old churches & castles (the latter thrill the boys), & we’re busy planning our trip to the Continent, which will occupy most of April. Mary is painting furiously now that the Spring has come, & I am working away at the library.

[502x751]607
Give my love to Aviva. How is Max? Give him my best.

As ever,

Des


—See 428.2.

—See 433.3.

March 16, 1963

Dear Desmond,

Well, if I were a critic like yourself with a reputation to worry about I might have been too inhibited to make the "extravagant" claims for Canadian love poetry which I did. But I'm not, so I can be as exuberant and free-wheeling as I choose and leave to others the "nice" question as to who praised their fair ones better, the Canadians or the Metaphysicals. Actually, if you read my "Foreword" carefully, you'll see that I up the Canadian lyricists for a quality of concreteness and particularity I don't find in the love poetry of other nations. As for the Metaphysicals, apart from a dozen poems by John Donne, just whom have you got in mind? Most of their stuff, and even Donne is not altogether exempt from the charge, strikes me as being too artificial to be good love poetry, phoney in fact. I'll take Leonard Cohen's lyrics anytime in preference. They have a true phallic tenderness. The English no more than the French can write a true love poem—that is, a truly sexual one. I'm amazed, though perhaps I shouldn't be, that you of all people can't see the difference between the genuine phallicism of the Canadian lyricists and the love-making that goes on in the head of the Englishman. Before you get too swamped by your present environment and lose your native shrewdness and health take down D.H. Lawrence and read him in your haste.

I'm also sorry you missed the wit, humour and economy of "This Machine Age". I've now read it at half-a-dozen campuses, most recently at Michigan State University. If there's one poem of mine that brings down the house, it's that one. That's the honest truth, Desmond. You're the only one who has ever objected to that poem. Your dislike of it puzzles me, and because I know it's sincere, troubles me also. How can you fail to see the neatness and hilarity of its wit? Or the craftsmanship behind a poem like that. You're not going stuffy on me, are you?

I will also defend "Portrait of An English Prof." I had a particular person in mind when I wrote it, a colleague at Sir George Williams. It hits him off perfectly. What can you possibly object [to] in it, unless you feel guilty by association? You and I both know such creatures exist—where's the wrong or the harm in exposing them? The harm and the wrong lies in NOT exposing them. They do literally
make me puke. I hate their guts, and if I can in any way neutralize their influence with their students I'm eager and proud to do so. Because of my work and activities, these eunuchs are finding it more and more difficult to play the professorial game and palm off their impotence as good taste, etc. I've pulled the mask off their faces. Of course they hate me for it, but the students don't, not the young people of this country. And they're the ones that matter.

A few statistics might help you get a perspective. *Love Where The Nights Are Long* has sold something like 5,000 copies in less than three months. Of course I understand that the purchasers are unaware the stuff they've bought is inferior to what some dead Metaphysical wrote three hundred years ago. I have no doubt that you or Louis Dudek one day will point this out to them. But you know what, Desmond? I don't think it'll make the slightest difference to them. Between the covers of that book I've given them vital poetry and a vital message, and in such matters the public has always a keener smell than--excuse me--the profs.

As for *Balls*, the bookstores can't keep a large enough supply, the copies keep getting sold out. I think it has already sold something like 2,000 copies though the book hasn't been out more than a month. That sort of book is sold by word of mouth, and it's poems like "This Machine Age" that is making it the popular success it has become. In sensibility you're behind the times, and you'll get my meaning more clearly when you read about *Balls* in the West German newspapers and journals. I can't say more now, but I promise you an exclusive story when the thing finally breaks. For now mum's the word.

I'm surprised to hear Macneice is shy and inarticulate. I'd never have thought it.

Aviva sends her love. My warmest regards to Mary and all the Paceys.

Hugs, Irving

PS [Aviva's hand] My bock is out! "The Singing Stones"3
12/6 Abelard-Schuman Get a copy!

1Irving Layton, poetry reading, Michigan State University, 3 March 1962.

2Layton does not recall what he meant here: I have been unable to find articles on this book in German newspapers or periodicals.

3Aviva Layton, *The Singing Stones*; see 340.7.

462. March 27, 1963

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of March 16.

Re the love lyrics, Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress" is the best love poem in the language, & Crashaw's "Wishes to
His Supposed Mistress\textsuperscript{2} is a humdinger, & what about
Lovelace, Suckling, Herrick? The only poet in your
anthology who has a real gift for amorous verse is Leonard
Cohen.\textsuperscript{3} Your own love poems are seldom your best—they are
either too rhetorical, or too diffuse, or too laboured.
Your tenderness comes out in your poems about children
("Naomi\textsuperscript{4}") or about animals—seldom about women. Your best
poems about women are witty—eg "When I placed my hand upon
her thigh" etc.\textsuperscript{5}

Your defence of your poetry is very suspicous. You try
to browbeat me by telling me how many copies have sold, &
how the students cheer. So what? Robert Service\textsuperscript{6} was the
best-selling poet in English of this century, & students
wept in the twenties when Bliss Carman read his poems at
Canadian universities. Almost all rebels have been ruined
when they became fashionable, & I am genuinely afraid that
you are becoming the victim of your own cult. To reduce
your ego to size, you should be with me when I interview
these English editors & they say blankly "Are there any
Canadian poets today?" It’s easy to be a big frog in the
little pool of Canadian narcissism—but you’ve got to go
beyond that if you’re going to win the Nobel Prize. I say
it again—many of the poems in \textit{Balls} are not worthy of you.
Isn’t it time you quit blasting away at the strawmen of
Canadian academies? If you’re going to do it, at least do
it wittily, as Yeats did in "The Scholars".\textsuperscript{7} And if you
really think I don’t like "Portrait of an English Prof"
because of guilt by association, you’re mad. The only
errections I measure are my own!\textsuperscript{8}

Hope Aviva’s book is a hit!

Love & kisses,
Des

\textsuperscript{1}Andrew Marvell, "To his Coy Mistress," \textit{The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell} 2 vols. ed.

\textsuperscript{2}Richard Crashaw, "Wishes. To his Supposed Mistress," \textit{Complete Poetry of Richard Crashaw}

and "The Cuckold’s Song," \textit{Love Where the Nights Are Long} 17, 22, 32, 43, 45. [The Layton poems in
this anthology are "Sacrament," "The Day Aviva Came to Paris," "The Bishopric," "Divinity," and
"Song for a Late Hour" (18, 36, 59, 65 71).]

\textsuperscript{4}See 18.7.

\textsuperscript{5}Irving Layton, "Misunderstanding," \textit{The Long Pea-Shooter} np.

\textsuperscript{6}Robert Service (1874-1958), popular poet who emigrated to Canada from England in 1896;
known to millions as the bard of the Yukon Gold Rush; author of \textit{Songs of a Sourdough} (1907).

\textsuperscript{7}W.B. Yeats, "The Scholars," \textit{Variorum} 337.
April 6, 1963

Dear Desmond,

"To His Coy Mistress" isn’t a love poem, it’s an elegant piece of trifling. Crashaw’s poem is a bore. The first one is still readable but only to pimply adolescents and rustic virgins, the other (no pun intended) is a crashing bore. That can only be stuffed down the throats of one of your captive audiences—Loveland and Suckling are phoneyes, their verse the verbal grimaces of simpering souls. English love poetry is infected with voyeurism. Herrick will endure—but that’s only because parsons and middle-aged profs will always find it difficult to get a hard-on without some auto-suggestion. The fact that you tell me you’ve begun to measure your erections makes me suspicious and fills me with alarm.

I wasn’t defending my poetry, but trying to give you a perspective other than the pedantic to measure it by. I am Not Robert Service nor Bliss Carman. I do not move my listeners by saying the cloying, acceptable things but by an uncompromising toughness. Popularity has made me more harsh, not less: vide Balls For A One-Armed Juggler.

You say my love poems are "diffuse", "laboured", "rhetorical". I agree with you. But how lucky for me that others are not so perceptive and acute as you are, eg the editor of Random House who has taken six of these poems for his anthology, Erotic Poetry: Classical and Modern. Just think of it—my unworthy verse cheek by jowl with Catullus, Donne, and Herrick.

You don’t scare me by quoting the sentiments of English editors and reviewers. The last poet the English produced was DT.2 They’re a joke, and you’re even funnier than they are by supposing anyone today takes seriously what the English have to say about poetry. For Gawd’s sake, Desmond, get rid of the academic stink. Yeats’ "The Scholars" is fine, but not half as witty as my "Portrait of An English Prof". What’s more my poem is contemporary both in feeling and expression; his is conventional on both counts. That you can’t see these simple things makes me shake my head dolefully. But I still love you.

Hugs, Irving

enclosure: ts "Coal" and "Das Wahre Ich"


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2Dylan Thomas.
April 30, 1963

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of April 6, which I have only recently received as we were touring the Continent from April 5 to April 28. We had a very strenuous but very enjoyable tour, spending three days in Paris, two days driving from Paris to Bandol on the French Riviera, a week there relaxing on the beach, then a two day drive over the Braccio Pass & down the Italian Peninsula as far as Rome, two & a half days in Rome, then up to Florence for a couple of days, then back up into France, to Aix-en-Provence, Avignon, Chartres, Versailles & finally to Boulogne to catch the ferry for Dover. The one grim spot was a breakdown (ball bearings cracked in the right rear wheel) forty miles north of Rome--we had to stay overnight in a small village while the garage hunted up a replacement part. We saw so much & formed so many impressions that I despair of giving you even a gist of the tour. I found the French way of life absolutely congenial & drank vast quantities of their wine. Rome excited me even more than Paris at first, but gradually its appeal palled--too many souvenir sellers, too many hands out for tips. Florence I loved--a real air of elegance & relative leisure. Paris of course is overwhelming: it makes London seem like a sprawling slum. What a sense of the French past & a pride in "la gloire de France"!

Now it's back to work in the library. But tomorrow being my birthday I'm taking the day off to attend the races at Newmarket.

Your flat assertions about Marvell, Lovelace etc are of course mere bombast. You've been getting away for far too long with vague unsupported assertions & denunciations. You need to abandon rhetoric for reason. You're a great big bluffer & it's time someone called your bluff.

Love to yourself & Aviva & the potential heir.

Des

May 13, 1963

Dear Desmond,

The weather has been crazy--like everything else in the world! Two days ago we had a snow blizzard--in May!--that took us back three quarters of a century in a search for precedents. This morning the sun is back looking down on the city, unapologetically, as if it had never deserted us. In a bar, away from the blizzard and blaring of angry horns, I met a French-Canadian whom Henry Miller calls a "genius" in Big Sur and the Oranges of H. Bosch. He's been living in Paris for the last ten years, after walking out on his job and swearing he'd never again do a day's work. He seems to have kept his vow. À la Miller, he's written five novels as well as written a history of Art. Trouble is none of the publishers like his work well enough to publish it. He also paints, and he's had several exhibitions in the smaller galleries of Paris. His name is Gerard Charlebois.
He's left his latest novel with me to read. If I think it's good, he wants me to put in a good word for him with Jack McClelland. That I'd do gladly—if the novel has anything at all. We'll be having him and his wife over for supper this week. It promises to be an interesting evening.

Two weeks ago I met a Hungarian refugee by name of Istvan Anhalt. He teaches music at the McGill Conservatory. He's interested in literature, very knowledgable. During the evening he gave me a wonderful lecture on the theory of electronic music, and then played some of his own compositions in that mode. Very impressive. He says he'd like to use some of my things for his next compositions. Maybe we'll collaborate on something, as Auden and Stravinsky did.

The two poems I sent you appear in this month's issue of Can Forum. You didn't comment on them, so I guess they were too subtle for you. When I have you here, I'll give you a lecture on both of them, since I not only "denounce" professors, but I also do what I can to educate them. I had one here this morning from St. Lawrence University. He's a Blake scholar of some repute. We had quite a set-to—not about Blake—but about Ferlinghetti. I disabused him of the notion that the latter was a poet, but in the course of the argument I actually taught him how to read a poem and what to look for. It's a service I dispense free of charge to all interested professors.

Nah, there isn't a word of truth in all this. I'm only bluffing!

Cogswell has taken two other recent poems of mine for The Fiddlehead. They're called "Homage to Lucullus" and "The Maddened Lover". I've written several others; one, "Spring Exultances" as fine a lyric as I've ever written, I've just mailed off to Milton Wilson.

The cemeteries are filled with the bones of those who decided "to call my bluff". Vide the May issue of the Canadian Forum which has not only the two poems I mentioned above but also a letter of mine to the editor. Poetry and rhetoric are of the gods; reasonable discourse is for mere mortals.

I'm studying German with the ex-Nazi of my poem, "Das Wahre Ich". It would help you to get away from your terrible Anglo-Saxon insularity if you did the same. Have you ever read Büchner's Danton's Death? If you haven't, do so at once. It will be [a] milestone in your intellectual development.

Haemorrhoids and solemnity are the true curses of the academician. I was heartened to learn you had soaked yourself in French wines. But fidelity is still your chief passion, isn't it? Has your pecker grown any since you last measured it? What a glorious day it is! Vivat! Vivat! Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving
There is a young French Canadian I know whose brain is seething with just such thoughts. He smells of genius a mile off. His letters are packed with extraordinary pickings and gleanings from every imaginable realm..." Chapter 9 ("Sauve qui Peut") 152.


Gerard Charlebois; I have been unable to find any information on a Quebecois writer by this name, and Miller does not give the name of his French-Canadian correspondent; however, Gerard Robitaille is a Quebecois writer influenced by the Beats whose novels are published in Paris, and it is possible Layton misremembered his name.


Latin: May he live!

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of May 13, which arrived this morning. You sounded as if you were in a very boisterous & cheerful mood, and I enjoyed your letter very much.

I am under a terrible shadow these days & cannot feel very cheerful about anything. For some weeks I have known that my mother, back on the farm near Hamilton, Ont, was not feeling very well, but I had no reason to think it was anything really serious. Then on May 9, last Thursday, I got a shocking letter from her doctor saying in effect that her present symptoms are the results of secondary growths of cancer in her lungs & other vital organs, & that there is nothing they can do except try to ease her pain. She had an operation for cancer of the uterus in 1949, & he says she is lucky to have lasted this long. He gave no suggestion as to how long she is likely to survive, and of course I am wondering whether I should fly home to see her, or whether her condition is likely to remain more or less static until my normal return in August. I wrote to the doctor by return to ask his advice, but have not yet heard from him again. If he does suggest my flying home, I shall probably leave almost at once, & shall be passing through Montreal. If there is any stopover time, I shall phone you, though I daresay it will be at a time when you are at work.

May 15, 1963
Naturally I have lived through the last few days in a
daze, & although I have gone through the motions of working
at the library I have not really been able to concentrate on
anything.

I hope you will forgive me this gloomy letter. Sorry
if I omitted to mention your poems. What letter were they
in? Not the last, for that merely included newspaper
clippings. I always enjoy your poems, & I hope you will
send more.

Love to Aviva & the embryo & to yourself.

As ever,
Des

May 24, 1963

Dear Desmond,

Your sad letter caught me when I was in the middle of
writing two articles and setting exams for Ross High School.
I am very distressed by the news of your mother’s illness
and share your anxiety. One feels so helpless. I remember
visiting my mother when she was taken ill: she had grown
very thin and as she lay on her bed, half-asleep, looking so
pitiful, I stood in the doorway and sobbed like a child. It
was my sobs that woke her and made her stir. She turned her
head towards me and smilingly asked me why there were tears
on my face. Then she made me sit on the bed near her and
took my hand in her own and began to stroke it as if she
were trying to comfort me. She knew it was I who needed
comforting more than she.

I hope by now you’ve received a more encouraging letter
from the doctor and that your immediate return is not
necessary. If you don’t return until August is there
anything I can do for you during your absence? I can’t
think of anything but one never knows. If I can do anything
to relieve you of some of your anxiety let me know.

Had I known you were under a shadow I’d not have ragged
you as I have in my recent letters. It was all in good,
malicious fun. You gave as good as you got, but for the
present let’s have a temporary truce. You’ve enough to
think of without having to think up new insults and
brickbats. When your mind is more at peace, you can start
swinging again.

I’ve written an article on "The Poet Today" for the
literary section of The Globe & Mail.¹ I ought to learn in
a few days whether they’ve taken it. The other article is
on F.R. Scott which I did for the CBC and which I’m
rewriting for the Can Forum.²

Aviva sends her love to you & Mary. Mine goes with it.

Hugs,
Irv

¹Irving Layton, "Poets, the Conscience of Mankind," Globe and Mail (Globe Magazine) 15
June 1963: 5 & 17. (ms "For Desmond with warmest regards, Irving. 16 June 1962.")
Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of May 24, & for the clipping from the Globe which arrived today. I see from the latter that you are still emitting a stream of platitudes about poetry, professors & penises. You are rapidly becoming the Kingsley Amis of Canada—the man of letters who has opinions on everything & will prophesy at the drop of a hat. Although he is a professor of English himself, Amis also rails against professors of English. It is all very silly & very childish, but I suppose it helps to sell your books. I still think you are playing a dangerous game: rhetoric is a habit that grows on one, & is no substitute for, but rather an antidote against, real thought. Instead of allowing your tongue—or pen—to freewheel all the time, I’d like to see you really engage the gears of your mind some time. Poetry is the enemy of all dogma & dogmatists, is it? OK, so it liberates the mind from dogma. And liberates it for what? What do you really value? Does your political philosophy still amount to merely the Kennedy line? (Not that I’m against Kennedy—I admire the things he has said & done lately—but I still don’t believe he is a profound political philosopher.) I’d like to see you spell out just what you do believe one of these days, and not keep evading the crucial issues by taking potshots at strawmen of your own contriving. There are as many different philosophies of life & personalities among English professors as among any other group of the population. It is simply naive & misleading to pretend that they can be grouped together as one contemptible entity.

Well, I shouldn’t devote so much space to your journalism, for the letter you wrote me on May 24th was a very sincere & helpful one. I appreciated it very much indeed. I have had no word of any kind about Mother for three weeks, so my imagination is running riot & I am in a very bad state of nerves. I just hope & pray she isn’t suffering too badly. At last report she was quite disoriented in her mind, & unable to recognize most of her visitors. It’s a hell of a way to die. I’m just living from day to day, trying to bury myself in my work.

Don’t get mad about the first part of this letter—-you know I enjoy arguing with you. Love to Aviva & the foetus. Is it kicking in true Layton style already?

Des P

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2."Frank Scott," Venture CBC Radio, 23 June 1963. (A radio portrait of F.R. Scott consisting of interviews with Scott, his friends and associates; Layton did not publish his contribution as an article.)
This "stream of platitudes" included:
For the most part, the English professors are intellectual deadbeats who think of their subject as a rampart protecting them against the ugly demands of contemporary life...The English professors are too busy paring their academic fingernails... (5)
Irving Layton, "Conscience."

Poetry opposes the totality of the self to the creeping totalitarianism of the 20th century...There is no force more subversive than poetry and that is why tyrants have always feared it and sought to suppress it." (17)

469.[pc]  
Lista del Correos,  
Denia, Alicante, Spain  
July 15, 1963  
Dear Desmond,  
After spending several days in each of the following places: Lisbon, Madrid, Toledo, Valencia and Mallorca, I've settled here for the summer.¹ I've a lovely villa beside the Medit and the weather is paradisal. My travels explain the lateness of this reply. Your touchiness about professors amuses me. I'm glad I've made you see the light on Kennedy and that I kept you from falling altogether for the left-wing shit about him which at one time you were ready to swallow completely. My real politics, like that of any poet, are those of eternity. I'll write you a long letter when I hear from you.

Love,

Irving

¹Layton rented a villa in Lista del Correos, Spain for July and August, 1963.

470.  
"The Cactus"¹  
[July 15, 1963]  
One can imagine an airman descending from the skies into its dark heart and centre.

It stands there beside the ripening fig-tree like a sinister green mutant, an eyesore, or tenement on Third Avenue.

Look closer: it's a fallen chandelier, or a modernistic sculpture of competing wavelets fixed forever in their last mounting.

Who can explain this thing for me --this insane proliferation?  
And who wants it at the end of my garden now in bloom with colourful begonias,
obstructing my clear view to the sea,
my neighbour's to the mountain?

And, see, it stands there so sure of itself,
so self-righteous,
as if it had the right to be where it is,
and has no feeling of disgrace
for its ugliness,
for its misshapen conquest of space and air:
but rather, in its leaves
a slow, dry litter of condescension
at any rate of guilt, of shame.

From this odious ramshackle affair
of pulp-ponderous roots and shoots
will the airman finally appear,
his face bruised, under a comic crown
of spiky, fat-fingered polyps?

And will his bleeding feet
be shod in the sandal-shaped leaves
of the cactus?

But where will he go?

Dear Desmond:

Here's a poem I just finished this am. If you want "ideas", you might try analyzing this "Cactus" of mine. Remember, I leave article-writing to those who can do this sort of thing: I prefer to "think" in poetry.

You jump at me when you read my Prefaces or read a rare article of mine in The Globe, professing to find fault with this, that, or the other, but I can't help noticing how wary you are about tackling a poem like "Butterfly on Rock"², or "A Tall Man Executes a Jig"³ in which I "think" the way a poet does--with the whole of my self.

And I wonder whether you'd really be happy if I wrote articles as well as you do, and you couldn't stick pins into me for being so "rhetorical", etc.

Love,
Irving

PS You ought to be ecstatic instead of sour that I've managed to get the country's ear--without the smallest compromise with respectability. You'd like it better if I were one of your "meek" poets.

¹Irving Layton, "The Cactus," The Laughing Rooster 34-35.

²See 444.5; Layton sent this poem with 444.

³See 380-81; Layton sent this poem under separate cover between 380 and 381.
Dear Desmond,

Tomorrow the Signor landlord is coming to collect the balance of the rent for his villa, and I’m going to talk to him about selling me the place outright. I’ve already spoken to his mother in my broken Spanish about such a deal --she appears to be the real owner of the place--and the thing might go through. If the price is not too high I shall purchase this villa for it has ample grounds to give me the privacy I want, and is beautifully situated between the Mediterranean and a stony front of mountain so wrapped in cloud I’ve taken to calling it "Old Smoky Face". The climate is a free gift from heaven. We’ve been here one week, and it’s been a continual outpouring of sunshine. I’ve completely shaken off the chills and fevers of Montreal, washed out all its wintry glooms from my bloodstream. My mind is as clear as the sky I’m now looking at; I’ve never felt as vigorous and alert as I do now. Since I’m a sun worshipper from way back why shouldn’t I retire to this place? Life in North America seems crazy beside the tremendous sanity of water, sky, and sunlight; why should I waste my beautiful energies battling neurotic countrymen who give themselves spiritual indigestion by swallowing lies from newspapers and books and who’ve wholly lost the capacity for frank enjoyment of body and spirit? They take mere complication for complexity--I’m not speaking here of the mindless herd--[who] value scholarship above insight, and like yourself are more at ease in the professorial world than in the poetic one where what truly counts is that the spirit burn brightly and give off a continual radiance.

Right now I’m worlds away from all cloacal polemics. You choose to not understand me, or are simply unable to: in either case you can’t help yourself. From the grand height of Old Smoky Face I look down at your poor frustrations and unease and offer you absolution from all sins present or to come--and they will come. There’s a hard core of obtuseness in you, Desmond: you offer up your willing flesh to the Muses but your spirit is weak or ill-equipped for a flight where you must breathe larger quantities of ozone than you are used to. Old Smoky Face agrees with me; he’s just pushed aside a veil of cloud to say so. You could never climb his stony front and dance naked beside me, joyful that the dark, perilous ledges of the ascent are now silently tucked away inside you--and that you are gloriously alive in the sunshine! Ah, you are obtuse, my friend. Heaviness drags you down, down, down. Not to perdition...but to a professorship! Reviewing The Swinging Flesh, with an ass-like gravity you assured your readers that professors lead as exciting lives as poets do--so what’s this nonsense Layton is spouting about professors living in quiet sheltering homes? Didn’t a smile pass over your lips when
you wrote those ludicrous words? Never mind, the number on
your readers’ lips made up for this sole unappearance. Of
course, of course, you, Frye, Milton Wilson, Klinck, and
that most estimable English prof Roy Daniells lead lives as
exciting as ever Byron and Catullus led: the world
breathlessly awaits the publication of your memoirs.
Domestic housewife to Keeler: "I fuck too."
It’s well-intentioned fellows like you and Frye who are
a menace to the creative life in Canada. Please don’t take
offence: I know more about these matters than you do. What
you both want is erudition, not insight; respectability, not
rebellion; commonsense, and not that spiritual conquest of
chaos which is the true adventure of the poet, his real
interiority, his perilous climb to selfhood. It is simply
not given to anyone else but another poet to understand
these words of mine, and as long as you or Frye or any other
professor persist in your blasphemous ways, you shall have
me to reckon with. For me the poet is the complete man, and
even when he fails in becoming that, I hold his failure to
be of more enduring significance than all the dust-gathering
tomes professors write to while away their toothache or
their tedium. It’s because there’s a great danger the
spirit might be smothered by bald-headed, fartless academics
that poets like myself, Karl Shapiro, and John Ciardi have
spoken out as savagely as we have. Believe me, Desmond, we
know the stakes involved much better than you do. In Canada
the peril is even more acute, since the battery of academics
is exceedingly well-placed and the shot it can muster
considerable, especially since our Canadian muttonheads are
disposed to believe every fart a salvo and every belch that
falls from the approved lips of a gowned monkey an
astonishing fusillade. It’s an old story, my boy. Take it
from me: there’s an unbridgeable gulf between you and
Mayakovsky, between Professor Pimpleface, D Litt, and
Pushkin. Professors are parasites of the spirit, feeding
and living off a radiance they may never have and can only
remotely surmise. Kierkegaard puts the issue between you
and me, between the tribe of poets and the tribe of
professors, between the children of the difficult light and
the prudent, learned, untroubled I-told-you-so "stay-at-
homes" in this quotation taken from his book, Repetition:
Job does not cut a figure in a university
chair and with reassuring gestures vouch for
the truth of his thesis...He sits among the
ashes and scrapes himself with a pot shard,
and without interrupting his manual labour
lets fall casual hints and remarks.³
If you can understand this, salvation for you is
still possible. However, you will probably dismiss it
with the word "rhetorical" and accuse K himself of
"posturing"—two doom-bird shrieks you habitually give
the barren, pathetic air when confronted by an
experience you cannot comprehend.
What’s the news about your mother? Give Mary my warmest love. Aviva sends hers. Mine you always have. Irving

enclosure: ms "For My Green Old Age," The Laughing Rooster 94.

1See 371.7.

2Christine Keeler (b. 1953), British callgirl involved in the "Profumo Affair" which occurred in 1963 when John Profumo, Secretary of State for War, admitted that he was having a relationship with Keeler, who was also involved with Soviet Captain Eugene Ivanov, Assistant Naval Attaché at the Soviet Embassy.


Dear Desmond,

My blast was unfair, but no more unfair than your likening me to Kingsley Amis and implying I wrote journalism in order to sell my books. My "journalism" consists of one 800-word piece I wrote for the Vancouver Sun,¹ and the article I did for The Globe. I know of no poet of my reputation who has done less article-writing and reviewing than myself. Three years ago I turned down an invitation from the NY Times to write a review-article for them.²

I’ve written you before: keep your eye on my poems³—nothing else counts. I have my own peculiar ways of serving my mistress, though you won’t believe it until you read about it in a book. James’ way of serving you know,⁴ but mine escapes your comprehension. Or has my "success" gone to your head too?

How’s your mother? Love to Mary.

Yrs,

2See 315.10.

3See 442.9.

⁴Layton alludes to the detached observation of moral and psychological problems, the cool exploration of states of feeling and calm analysis of motives which typify the novels of Henry James, in contrast to his own intuitive approach.
Dear Irving,

Thank you for your two cards & one letter from Spain. The last few weeks have been very hectic—hence my long silence. First of all, on June 22, came a cable announcing my mother’s death. This was a great shock, as the doctor had suggested she had several months to live. Eventually, of course, I have come to feel that her sudden death—of a stroke—was a mercy, as it spared her of a lingering period of increasing pain—but at first the shock was numbing.

Since the beginning of July, I have been involved in a series of university conferences—for four days in Edinburgh, four days here, a week in London, & most recently a week at the University of Wales.¹ Now we must leave for the ship in two weeks’ time, & will be busy most of that time cleaning up this house & packing all our things. We also hope to take the odd day trip, & of course I have still a lot of work to do in the library.

I am perfectly well-intentioned towards you & don’t believe that my occasional strictures are motivated by envy. I like our arguments, though not all my points are mere debating points. You are inclined to do a lot of loose thinking—but the great thing is that you are vital & creative. We must continue our argument on more specific points when we are both back in Canada & can exchange letters more frequently.

At the risk of making you even more angry, I must say though that I am not greatly impressed with "The Cactus"—it’s a bit like Lawrence, but so much inferior to "Figs"², for example—not really worthy of you in its present form; but capable of development. Of course I may have missed its subtleties!

Of course, I wouldn’t like you better if you were a ‘meek’ poet—I love you the way you are, but that doesn’t mean that I can’t spot your weak spots.

Love,

Des

¹See 456.2.


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Denia, Alicante, Spain
August 9, 1963

Dear Desmond,

I’m grieved to learn of the sad news of your mother’s death. From your letters and from remarks I’ve heard you make from time to time, I get the feeling that you were very fond of her and felt close to her. Since the wound must still be raw, I won’t offer you any of the usual words of consoling wisdom that touch on the mortality of man. But I wish I had met her. Since I like the son so much I’m sure I
would have liked her. However, I can say truthfully that I know how you feel and that I feel with you.

So you’re off to Canada in a couple of weeks. I hope it has been a very productive year for you and that you’ve hived away material for many, many books. I get the impression you haven’t been letting the laurels grow under your feet, but have gone here, there, and everywhere to pluck fresh ones. I shall be looking forward to reading those books or to the premonitory articles heralding them in the quarterlies and elsewhere. I wonder if you at any time ran into Milton Wilson during your stay in London. Like yourself he got some sort of grant to work on a new book—his, I think, is one on the Romantic poets’ view of Venice.¹

Of course, I enjoy our epistolary arguments as much as you do—perhaps a great deal more. It gives me a chance to improve on my gifts for invective and vituperation. More than that, however, I cream off the requisite emotions I need for my poems—a rather nasty thing I do with life in general. That’s why I keep admonishing you to keep your eyes on the poems, and that nothing else matters. Of course that doesn’t mean that I’m simply trying to score debaters’ points off you. It does mean I dramatize and exaggerate in order to sharpen impressions.

E.G. When I send you two books of poems, and you reply by making some scornful reference to the "rhetoric" of the prefaces and alluding to a minor piece in Balls, etc: Now, that’s priceless. That’s the kind of thing only life can offer up to the sardonic, wideawake poet and that I like to pounce on as if it were a mouse and I a hungry cat.

Anyone who wasn’t an Eng Prof would rejoice at both prefaces, for they make two powerful, much-needed statements for which I have received encomiums and thanks from high and low across the country. The professor is interested in "loose thinking" but what does he know about the creative demands that life makes at a given time? As for their style, that has been praised by Pierre Berton, MacLean², and the fellow who wrote the biography of William Lyon Mackenzie³ and by his wife also, a working journalist.⁴ I’m not citing them to bolster up my position, but to make you pause for a moment and reflect on the possibility that the professorial and the poetic approach to living issues may possibly be, as I’ve tried now several times to say, diametrically opposed to each other.

When Frye comes out and says that the scholar and the creative artist are coming closer and closer to each other, and will soon be indistinguishable,⁵ or when you come along and mutter under your mortarboard that professors lead every bit as exciting lives as poets do, I become worried, because I know both of you really believe this nonsense. If only I could persuade you that it’s the poet’s feeling for life that’s important about him and that he above all others has his finger on the pulse of it—and that all the rest is commentary!
Now take your stricture of the poem I sent you, "Cactus". I'm sorry you don't like it, but perhaps you'll change your opinion when you see it in print. Only an English prof would say it made him think of Lawrence's "Figs". Two poems more unlike I do not know. Lawrence was a collier's son who tried desperately to get the coal dust out of his hair and skin and stand forth a pagan. I am a Hebrew pagan: that is, a pagan with a metaphysical sense of evil, something Lawrence didn't possess. My poem is about the human situation today—the reference in the 3rd line to the "dark heart and centre" should have alerted you. You might give the poem to someone subtler and wiser than yourself to interpret it for you—on yourself, I see it has been wasted! A hint: try thinking of the cactus as Evil, and the descending airman as fallen man. And how could lines such as these fail to stir you:

From this odious ramshackle affair
of pulp-ponderous roots and shoots
will the airman finally appear,
his face bruised, under a comic crown
of spiky, fat-fingered polyps?

And will his bleeding feet
be shod in the sandal-shaped leaves
of the cactus?

But where, where will he go?

[Marginalia]: Man, as a comic Christ figure today.
Free from evil but still tainted by it, where does man go?
And where are you going, my friend?

Love,
Irving

Addendum: Lawrence's poem "Figs" is a descriptive lyric, a nature poem: [It should have ended with the line "That's youth, fig, dew, etc." After that, the poem descends into didactic bathos. "Bare Fig Trees" is much better.]: mine isn't. A better comparison would be with his "Snake" poem, for there he makes of the visiting snake a symbol with disturbing meanings for our mechanical civilization. Now when I say Lawrence has no sense of metaphysical evil—I mean just that, metaphysical, something uneradicable, original, mysterious. That's what I meant when I once wrote in a letter that A.M. Klein had no sense of evil, and which you picked up and with your usual thick-headedness misinterpreted. Forsooth, you professorialized, how can Layton say anything so patently absurd and foolish: Doesn't A.M. Klein write about Hitler and his thugs, and about the tragic things that happened to his people?

My friend, I still blush for you when I read the paragraph in which this particular piece of assholeness occurs. I suggest if you ever bring out a revised edition you eliminate it for your own good. Your stock as a perceptive critic might go up somewhat if you do.

I've been writing furiously since coming to this villa complete with lizards, almond-trees, toads and cacti. I
have enough for another book of poems which I expect to publish next spring under the tentative title of Poems in Bad Taste. This morning I finished a long poem called "El Gusano" (The Worm)—a really tremendous thing. And I do love you.

Irving

PS There was a fellow called Pacey
Who wished people to think he was racy,
He wrote the word "IT"
And rhymed it with "SHIT"
And said: "That Pacey is racy they may see!"

1Wilton Wilson did not realize this project.
2CBC producer Ross McLean, see 343.2.
4William and Mary Kilbourn; see 441.1 & .2.
5See 342.1.
6D.H. Lawrence, "Bare Fig Trees," Complete Poems II: 25-27.
7Lawrence, "Snake, Complete Poems II: 77-80.
8Irving Layton, rev. of Poems by A.M. Klein, First Statement (April-May, 1945) 35-36; see 229.11.
9Layton refers to a passage from Pacey's Ten Canadian Poets:
The predominantly exultant tone of these poems has led Mr. Irving Layton to charge in First Statement that Klein shows an insufficient acquaintance with evil. "To know God truly" he writes, "one must also have known Satan; Klein gives no evidence of ever having been within a hundred yards of that versatile gentleman. A brisk acquaintance with the latter might have injected a deeper note into some of the verses. As it is, the Psalms are not a record of spiritual trials undergone and the religious insights derived from them, so much as a recording of specific, communicable emotions." This is unfair: it fails to take account of the many preceding poems in which Klein had shown a very real acquaintance with the Satanic and had expressed his doubts and at times even his despair; it even fails to take account of those of the Psalms such as I, IV, V, VI, XIII, XXII, XXIII, XXV and XXVI in which Klein inveighs against both God and man for their cruelty and injustice. There is nothing facile about Klein's faith; all his poetry is the record of an intense spiritual struggle from which he emerges with faith in his heart and a psalm on his lips only after enduring wrenching agony. Mr. Layton, however, makes amends for this unfair accusation when he goes on to sum up thus brilliantly the total effect of these psalms of Abraham: "Taken altogether, they wonderfully express the Jew's attitude towards his God, an attitude which is a rich and puzzling alloy of self-abasement and pride, of humility and defiance; it is one of accepting the heavenly scourge while establishing at the same time his human dignity by questioning its necessity or its timing. It is this peculiarly
intimate, sultry and difficult relationship between the Jews and their God which is revealed on almost every page of the Psalter." Ten Canadian Poets 284-85.


475. [pc] Denia, Alicante, Spain

August 11, 1963

Dear Desmond,

You were right about "The Cactus". I worked on it yesterday, and I think it's all right now.

Thanks for being so patient with me. You're a good friend.

Last night I finished a 30 line poem called "El Caudillo". It's one of the best things I've done this summer. I ought to have a book of 40 poems. Leonard Cohen is sending me his novel, just published.2

Bon Voyage,

Irving

1 Irving Layton, "El Caudillo," The Laughing Rooster 29.

2 The Favourite Game: see 457.1.

476. August 16, 1963

Dear Irving,

Just a hurried note, since we are in the thick of preparations for departure--but I must thank you for your letter of August 9 & your postcard of August 11. Your card was very humble about "The Cactus", & your letter very arrogant. In spite of your low opinion of my intelligence, I did see the symbolism in the poem, & of course realized that it wasn't doing just the same job as Lawrence's "Figs" etc. But in saying it was weak I meant a) that it lacked that sense of the cactus's "otherness" & "uniqueness of being" which Lawrence does manage so splendidly to capture in poems of that sort and b) that many of its lines limped. I hope you have fixed it up now. I should have said, by the way, that I liked very much the other poem you sent me--about putting your hand between her thighs etc--but with such poems I'm never sure whether my liking is merely a stock response--I'm so fond of putting my hand between female thighs!

Today I spent at the home of Sir Geoffrey Keynes2 copying out extracts from the (unpublished) letters Rupert Brooke wrote from Canada during his stay in 19123--very interesting! I have masses of notes--enough for two or three books & scores of articles if I ever get time to write them.
When are you to be back in Montreal? We must get together for a good session of frank talk as soon as possible.

How are the senoritas in bed?

Love & kisses,
Des P

1"For My Green Old Age," see 471.4.


3Rupert Brooke (1887-1915), the English poet, embarked in May 1913 on a journey to the United States, Canada, and the South Seas, writing a series of travel pieces for the Westminster Gazette; he returned to England in June 1914.

477.[pc] Denia Alicante, Spain
[August 18, 1963pm]

"Thoughts of A Cynic"¹

A friend writes me to say
my articles do not please
and that their rhetoric
has turned him sick.

He's quick
to note the faults in these
—all shallow amusements of mine—
but leaves severely alone
the consideration of a poem.
I wonder too how pleased he'd be
If I wrote prose as fine as he.

Olé,
Layton

PS I've written a sonnet called "Icarus"² suggested to me by your saying in a letter that I was "bluffing".³ A really good thing. Hope you had a nice crossing.

Love,
Irving

¹Irving Layton, "Thoughts of a Cynic," unpublished.


³At the end of 464, Pacey states "You're a great big bluffer & it's time someone called your bluff."
Dear Irving,

I hear from Fred Cogswell that you are back in Montreal, & I am hoping to see you as soon as possible.

I have a meeting in Toronto on Thursday, October 3, and my tentative plan is to drive back on Friday, October 4. Mary will be with me. If you are to be free that Friday evening, we might stop over in Montreal that night, & drive on to Fredericton on Saturday. In fact, if you have a spare room now that Max has left you, we might sleep at your place. Let me know what suits you, will you?

I am afraid I am not in a very cheerful mood at the moment. We just discovered last night that Mary will have to undergo a hysterectomy in late October or early November, & this is quite a blow. However, we are very anxious to see you & Aviva again & hope that you and the potential heir are all in good shape.

Love,
Des

Dear Desmond,

I’m delighted to learn you’re coming to Montreal with Mary. Of course I’ll be free that Friday evening and you’re welcome to stay at my place for as long as you choose. Maxie’s room is free and even if it weren’t I’d have the carpenters construct another so that I might have the great pleasure of your company.

We have a late supper on Fridays since I’ve a lecture at Sir George Williams that ends at 8:20 pm. So do plan on having supper with us, and Aviva who’s lately been applying herself very diligently to her cooking will make something very wonderful for the occasion.

It’s really miraculously splendid that you can pass through Montreal and that we can see each other just after you and I have come back from Europe. We’ll have a great deal to tell each other. I’m very eager to learn your impressions of England and English writers. The year must have meant a great deal to you and Mary. For myself, to prepare you, I’ve written about thirty publishable poems (Can Forum has taken 5; TR, 6) and I’m well on the way to having another book for publication in the autumn of ’64.

Now I want to get down to prose—a novel, or another volume of short stories. Have you read Cohen’s The Favourite Game? Seen Fellini’s 8½? I’m looking forward to a good long talk with you.

I suppose I didn’t tell you that Aviva had a miscarriage just before the summer started. I consoled her by saying that a poet always throws away his first draft. It’s the final version that counts: look at Maxie! look at Sissyboo!
The news about Mary makes me very unhappy. Betty had the same operation. It’s the psychological effects you must both be prepared for, the operation itself is not a difficult one. Give her all my sympathy and love. Write if you can; if not, we’ll be seeing you soon.

Love,

Irv

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Dear Irving,

I have your letter of Sept 25, but am sorry to say that we shan’t be able to accept your invitation. The doctors decided that Mary should have her operation at once, so she entered hospital last Sunday & had the operation Wednesday morning. She came through with flying colours, but will not be fit for travel for several weeks at best. As I am now in sole charge of the family, I have cancelled my trip to Toronto.

I am supposed to go to Ottawa for a meeting on October 18, however, & am hopeful that I shall be able to go there. I shall try to arrange for a stopover in Montreal that weekend.

Sorry to hear about Aviva’s miscarriage. No, you hadn’t told me. Give her my love. How’s her children’s book doing?

Like you, I am longing for a good talk, & we must get together soon.

Love,

As ever, Des

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Dear Desmond,

We had laid down new carpets—red ones, of course—in the hallway and den in anticipation of seeing you and Mary. And Aviva had ransacked all the Mexican shops, pouncing on every attractive basket, cushion, or lampshade she saw. What a disappointment when I got your letter saying you couldn’t come. I’m relieved to hear the operation went off well and that Mary is doing fine. Give her our love and good wishes for a quick recovery.

I hope you can make it for the weekend of the 18th. Your room is waiting for you, and the carpets will still
have their healthy flush. I’m looking forward to a really
good talk with you. Poetry, politics, women, and what it
means to be alive in the "Year of the big Thaw". In the
world of politics, things are going pretty much as I
expected them to: the Russians are slowly disintegrating the
legacy of Stalinism, and discovering they are after all an
Occidental country and that their future is with the West.
The schism in the Russian soul that began with Peter the
Great is slowly being healed, though a cicatrice will
always show where the healing took place. Frost, as you
probably know, was so impressed by Kruschev that at one
point he thought of returning to Russia and settling there.
Frost had my own contempt for liberal blabbermouths and
admiration for the good man who’s not afraid of exercising
power.

I think he and I would have agreed about Kennedy.
Liberals and left-wingers are impatient with him because he
doesn’t ham-handedly go about putting his entire program on
the line, but wisely takes first things first. The great
issue of our time was PEACE (with honour). Kennedy is well
on the way to achieving that. The next great issue is Negro
equality. Here he’s mounted an attack on the
segregationists that must yield him victory. Can anyone
doubt that?

His second term will see him doing what his
blabbermouthing critics want to see him doing now: fight for
a comprehensive program of welfare measures. When he leaves
office, he’ll leave America and indeed the whole world a
much better and a much safer place to live in. He’s truly a
wise and noble prince. I’ll not be surprised to see Germany
unified within the next two to three years. And should that
happen, can anyone doubt that peace has come to stay?

This weekend I wrote three poems. My book is coming on
fine. I still have to write the "preface" for it. The
main point I wish to make in it is that the poet is not a
gentleman and that his whole aim and purpose is to upset the
canons of good taste. The older I grow the less patience I
have with "society", which I’m coming to see more and more
as a block of ice that must be melted by the poet’s passion.

Society is only a variant spelling of hypocrisy. It’s
forever at war with whatever is fresh, vital, and creative.
If you think I’m employing an abstraction then you can
substitute "the majority of men and women" for society.
Either way it comes down to the same thing: a hatred of the
searing vision of the artist which mocks their comforts and
their compromises. Professors, critics, clergymen, and all
the penny-a-liners in the world exist largely for the
purpose of blunting his impact. Hence my detestation of the
Northrop Fryes. The poet is alone with his experience:
that’s his unique glory and martyrdom. That’s the live coal
that everyone else waits for to cool down and become a
clinker.
The foregoing is what I’m going to say at the Foster Conference of Quebec poets next week. It’s being called by John Glassco; Scott and Smith assisting. I’ll write you all about it. Write when you can.

Love,
Irving

1Relations between the United States and the Soviet Union warmed considerably throughout 1963 after the nadir of the Cuban Crisis the preceding year; they signed an atomic energy cooperation agreement in May, followed by a nuclear test-ban treaty and a direct Soviet-US telegraphic and radio link (the “Hot Line”) agreement, both in August.

Peter the Great (1672—1725), Tsar of Russia from 1682 and Emperor from 1721, began a series of reforms to Europeanize backward Russia, affecting every field of the national life, including such superficial but symbolic decrees as beards should be shorn off and Western dress worn.

3On July 23, 1962, Kennedy asked Frost to visit the USSR as part of a cultural exchange “good-will mission” under the auspices of the Department of State; the visit occurred August 29-9 September. Frost’s first words to reporters at Idlewild Airport upon his return were "Kruschev thought that we’re too liberal to fight—he thinks we will sit on one hand and then the other."

4Kennedy asked Congress to pass legislation requiring hotels, motels and restaurants to admit customers regardless of race. He also asked Congress to grant the Attorney General authority to begin court suits to desegregate schools on behalf of private citizens who were unable to start legal action themselves.

5Kennedy was assassinated in the third year of his first term, in Dallas, where he had gone to heal a split in the Texas Democratic Party before the 1964 Presidential campaign, in which he planned to run for a second term.


October 11, 1963
Dear Irving,
Thank you for your letter of October 7. I’m afraid our proposed visit of October 18 is also off. Mary has been & is very ill indeed. She had her operation two weeks ago last Wednesday, & for the first week was doing fine. Then on the following Wednesday she had a slight haemorrhage, & the next day a bad one which necessitated blood transfusions. This Monday was the worst—she had a very severe haemorrhage & the doctor decided it was necessary to take her back to the operating room & put in new stitches. She was given oxygen & blood & for a few hours her life hung in the balance. She rallied, & is now
slowly regaining health—but of course there is always the chance of another haemorrhage. She is weak & frail & looks like a different person—she has a kind of unearthly look. Needless to say my days are passed in a torture of worry & if you’ve any God to pray to pray to him for all you’re worth.

Last night I met Mary McIlwraith & was delighted to learn she knows you.

Write me a cheering letter when you can & I’ll try to be a better correspondent when this crisis is over.

Love,
Des

1Unidentified.

483. October 26, 1963
Dear Desmond,

Here’s my letter—exactly one week late! I should have sat down immediately after our telephone conversation and written, but I put it off for the next day. That was my mistake. Things began popping all over the place, people dropping in, calls for help from assorted relatives, and not least a couple of troublesome inspirations. In the past week I’ve written about a dozen poems, among them two or three of special merit. Actually I’ve been going strong since my return from Spain. I’ve been writing poems as though someone was going to pass an edict outlawing them. Poems in Poor Taste should be on the publisher’s desk before Xmas; I still want to write another seven or eight poems to bring the total up to the grand number of 65. If this sounds too much like a merchant’s outlook or phraseology, it can’t be helped. I derive it from my mother.

I’m very enthusiastic about this forthcoming book. It’s richer, lustier, more exuberant than Balls, etc. These last dozen poems I’ve written are corkscrews up anyone’s arse. They leap at you from the page, though with no loss of their customary elegance. The night I was at Quebec to pick up my prize money, I wrote six poems, one of which, "Strategy", is as fine a satirical thing as I’ve ever done. You’ll be seeing it shortly, I believe, in the Canadian Forum. I’m going to type out two shorter pieces for you. I hope you like them.

Aviva is off in New York, shepherding her students through the United Nations building, Guggenheim Art Museum, and god knows what other horrors. She’ll be returning tomorrow evening. Living with a poet is not easy, but she’s a good and gallant woman. I love her deeply. Yesterday, Max told me he wanted to quit school (he’s in Grade XII, equivalent of First Year McGill) and spend the year reading literature, philosophy and political science on his own. He’s bored at school and thinks he’s wasting his time there. He’s probably right in feeling the way he does, but I don’t
like the idea of him losing a year. He’s coming up to see me later in the afternoon. It ought to be quite a session.

We were greatly relieved to hear that Mary was recovering nicely, and to hear your cheerful voice. Of course I prayed for her, with skull-cap & phylacteries. There’s a special charm in the latter, and I’m glad to see it worked. Give her my love and the warmest of hugs.

I’m seeing Leonard tonight for supper. We’re celebrating my prize and his—he won the CBC award for his poems. After that we’ll raid the City Hall and write our poems on all the files and ledgers we can find.

Love,
Irving

enclosure: ts "Pleasure" and "Creation"

1Layton’s next collection was titled The Laughing Rooster.

2Layton’s mother, Keine Lazarovitch ran a grocery store on Saint Elizabeth Street in Montreal; in 1925 she purchased a small store on Avenue de l’Hotel de Ville.

3It was announced on October 25 that Layton’s Balls for a One-Armed Juggler won the Prix Littérature de Québec, a cash award of $4,000, sponsored by the Quebec Cultural Affairs Department.

4Layton had published the poem "Strategy" in Music on a Kazoo (18); he is here presumably referring to a poem whose title he later changed; his next poems to appear in the Forum are the four cited in 479 and "Portrait of a Genius," (June 1964): 60.


6Leonard Cohen won the CBC competition for New Canadian Writers Under 30 for a group of poems titled Opium for Hitler.
& I would drive it back to Fredericton on Sunday. If your spare room is available for that weekend, Mary & I would love to stay in it—but if it is at all inconvenient don’t hesitate to say so, & we’ll get a hotel room. Will you let us know as soon as possible?

I hope nothing happens to prevent this trip...Mary is making a very rapid recovery, & even went swimming at the university pool last night. I suppose it is possible she will have a relapse, but her doctor seems to think she is going to be fine now.

I am fabulously busy. I don’t know whether I told you, but just before I left for England I foolishly agreed to write a 200 page history of Canadian literature as part of a book on The Literature of the Commonwealth being published by Cornell University Press. In a rash moment I agreed to have the manuscript in by September 1, 1963. Of course I completely forgot about the job in England, & was shocked to get a letter late in August asking if I had the ms ready! So I begged for an extension—and they gave me until November 1. I might have made that if Mary hadn’t fallen ill, but for the four weeks she was in hospital I was flat out. Now I have started to write, & have done 75 pages (up to Lampman). I find that 25 pages a day is all I can write without getting so tense I can’t even spell, and as most of my days are occupied at the college anyway I can’t possibly finish the thing in less than three more weeks. So forgive me if I don’t write many letters—think of me at my hackwork! But, you know, I’ve written so damn much now about old geezers like Sangster & Roberts that I feel I know them better than I know myself.

And once this thing is written I have a host of other things to write. I still have my commitment to write the "Introduction" to the Twentieth Century Section of old Klinck’s Literary History of Canada (why the hell did Canadians even bother to write anyway?), and I have ideas for three books which could be written on the basis of my Cambridge research. Then I have notes for about six short stories arising out of my Cambridge experiences, notes for an article on an afternoon Mary & I spent with Henry Moore the sculptor, & notes for a book of travel & reminiscence called "An English Year".

How much of all this will I ever get written?

Well, we certainly should be able to have a great talk if this Montreal trip eventuates.

Cheers!

Love & kisses,
Des

1Due to publishing delays, this book did not appear until 1979:

In 1961 The Commonwealth Pen: An Introduction to the Literature of the British Commonwealth, a history of Canadian literature for Literature of the Commonwealth (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1961) was published. A few years later, it was decided that a much longer and more comprehensive study should be prepared, since Commonwealth Literature, per se, was growing in academic
acceptance. The economic problems of American university presses delayed publication for three years, and then a change of managing editors at the press which had accepted the manuscript resulted in a decision to issue the work as a series of books, for the marketing department had concluded that such an arrangement would assure a better financial return. The Literature of Australia and New Zealand (Volume I) was published in 1971 as a cooperative venture between two institutions, but a decision to end the joint-publication project left the whole series in jeopardy. Dr. Prema Nandakuma's Indian Literature in English has recently appeared from an Indian publisher; the African volume was never completed, and the Canadian volume has remained unpublished. A.L. McLeod, "Preface," vii—viii

Desmond Pacey, Poure above Poures 4: Essays Canadian Literature in English (Mysore, India: Centre for Commonwealth Literature and Research, 1979).


3Pacey did not publish his books based on his research in Cambridge 1962-63.


November 1, 1963

Dear Desmond,

By all means come and stay with us. We'd love to see you and Mary, and I'm dying to have a good long talk with you. Please forgive this pc but I can get this off to you at once. I'll probably write you a letter over the weekend. All my love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

249 Winslow St,
Fredericton, NB

Wednesday [November 6, 1963]

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your postcard.

This is just to confirm that, barring emergencies, we'll be coming this weekend--arriving by air at 7:25 pm Friday & leaving by car Sunday morning. If you're free, meet us us at the airport Friday night--but if you're not there we'll proceed by taxi to your place.

How are the adulterous fingers tickling these days?

Love & tickles,
Des
487. November 22, [1963]

Dear Irving,

Terribly sorry not to have written before this, but I’ve been driving away night & day at the book, & have just this minute finished it—a week late.¹

We did so much enjoy our stay with you & Aviva. The talk was most delightful & stimulating, & the food & drink delicious.

Mary & I are both coming up again this coming weekend, but as we have to accommodate ourselves to the plans of the UNB Alumni Society² we shan’t be as free as we were last time. They have reserved a room for us Saturday night at the Ritz Hotel, & plane reservations coming up to Montreal Saturday morning & going back Sunday evening. I suppose this rules out a party at your place, as we go the UNB dinner & dance Saturday night. We might meet you for a drink Saturday afternoon if you wish—say about 4 o’clock somewhere—and Mary & I would like to entertain you & Aviva to dinner on Sunday at noon if that would suit you.

As you probably notice, I have writer’s cramp from that damned book, so I’ll cut this off. Let us know where we can meet you Saturday pm.

Love,
Des

¹See 484.1.

²The Paceys were guests of the Montreal chapter of the University of New Brunswick Alumni Society.

488. [November 25-26, 1963]

Dear Desmond,

Your stay with us gave Aviva and me much pleasure. We’re truly sorry you & Mary can’t make it again this weekend, but delighted to learn you’re coming to Montreal. How about meeting in the lobby of the Ritz at 4 PM?

Love,
Irving

enclosure: ts "On the Assassination of President Kennedy," The Laughing Rooster 110.

489. December 14, 1963

Dear Irving & Aviva,

I am sorry to have been such a poor correspondant this fall. The fact is I have never been so busy in my life, and I now feel as if a giant bulldozer had run over me fifty-eight times.

I finally got my 225 pages written for the book on Literature of the Commonwealth on December 1, & then had to turn to the writing of the 40 Page "Introduction" to Part III (1920-60) of The Literary History of Canada. I have
just finished that, and I feel (probably quite wrongly) that
it is a classic of Canadian prose, as imperishable as the
Gettysburg Address!\footnote{Famous speech by President Abraham Lincoln at the dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 19 November 1863.} If you can bray, sir, why shouldn't I?

Terribly sorry to have missed seeing you at the end of
November. I was all packed & ready to leave for the airport
when they phoned to say all planes were grounded.

You must tell me what are your mature reflections on
the effects of Kennedy's death.\footnote{President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas.}

I very much enjoyed your poems in the current Canadian
Forum,\footnote{Irving Layton, "Four Poems" ("For My Former Students," "Ballad of the Old Spaniard," "At the Pier in Denia," "The Lizard") Canadian Forum Dec. 1963: 197-98.} especially the one about the old man.\footnote{"Ballad of the Old Spaniard."}

Now that I have these two pieces of literary history
written, I hope to turn to some writing of a more personal
sort. I may try a book on my English experiences, & at
least must write some of the short stories I have ideas for.

Have you read Jack Ludwig's novel Confusions?\footnote{Jack Ludwig, Confusions (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963).} Very
disappointing. From his short stories,\footnote{Ludwig, (see 380.6), author of three novels, has not published a volume of short stories
despite many awards for his early work in the genre: the Atlantic First Award for fiction in 1960, the Longview Foundation award in 1960, the Martha Foley Best American Short Stories Award in 1961 and O. Henry Awards in 1961 and 1965.} I had expected him
to be capable of a really good novel, but it is sophomoric
posturing. Leonard's novel is the best Canadian novel I've
read this year--& I've been reading a raft of them lately

I'm glad to say Mary is now back to normal. Her
exhibition was a great success--she sold eight of the thirty
paintings in the show.

Mary Ann is doing well at college--yesterday for
example she got back her essay on the epic with the comment
"This is the most mature & sensitive essay I've read all
term."

Love,

Des
490.[cc] [December, 1963]

Did Irving tell you that the little embryo dates back
almost exactly to the weekend you people stayed with us!
If it's a girl (we hope) we'll call her "Fanny Hill Layton".

Love & kisses,
Irving & Aviva

[Aviva's handwriting]

PS Special regards to Philip.

491. [December, 1963]

Dear Aviva & Irving,

We did so much enjoy our day and two nights with you.
I am terribly impressed with Aviva's ability and performance
as a housekeeper and cook while she holds down a teaching
job and writes for children to say nothing of reading her
husband delicious bedtime bits.

I very much enjoyed your poems in the last Canadian
Forum too, Irving.¹

The exhibition which followed mine at UNB is of
graphics by David Silverburg.² We notice he taught at Ross
HS. Did you know him? He spoke at his opening, and now
teaches art at Mt A. I took the snap of the rest of the
family.³ Did you mistake one of my daughters for me? They
all look like Des, don't they?

Love,
Mary

¹See 489.3.

²David Silverburg (b. 1936), one of Canada's leading printmakers with solo exhibitions
coast to coast; a member of the Fine Arts Department at Mount Allison University since 1963.

³The 1963 Pacey Christmas card featured a photograph of the family.

492. Tuesday [December, 1963]

Dear Mary,

Of course I know David Silverburg. He was my colleague
last year at Ross High School, and I helped find titles for
his exhibition. In fact, "A Wind Out of Hades"¹ is one of
the titles I gave him which he used. Talk about casting
bread on the waters.²

How do you like his work? He's got a great deal of
energy and imagination, don't you think? He also has a
marvellous collection of jokes and anecdotes which he tells
superlatively. He's an excellent raconteur. And like
myself, he's got an eye for pretty women. So look out,
Mary. Or rather, Desmond! Not everyone is as honourable as
I am.

Aviva is busy preparing Xmas cheer for tonight.
Leonard Cohen is coming, and we're also expecting a
childhood memory of Aviva's from Sydney, Australia. Since
my son will be here too he’ll be able to look after her, since she’s about his age. You ought to see Max. He’s got long hair and a beard, and the finest, frankest face I’ve seen on any youth. You’d love to paint or draw it, Mary. A pity my talents don’t run that way. When it comes to faces, words just haven’t got the immediacy and impact of line or colour.

Aviva is treating me to all the symptoms proper to her situation. She’s two months pregnant. We rejoice each time she throws up. Her nausea is a good sign says her "ginny" (my coinage).3 Her mother is coming all the way from Sydney for the birth which is expected early August. I’ll be overrun with women, but I’ve seen The Conjugal Bed4 and am resigned to my fate.

Aviva sends her love to you and Desmond.

Hugs & lots of kisses,
Irving

1Layton’s tentative title for his next collection, The Laughing Rooster (see 493).

2"Cast thy bread upon the water: for thou shalt find it after many days." Ecclesiastes 11:1.

3For gynecologist.


December 24, 1963
Dear Desmond,

Your welcome letter, dated I see Dec 16th, arrived only two or three days ago. Delighted to learn that you’ve finally unburdened yourself of all your imperishable thoughts and rendered thus empty-minded are in a mood to bray. I thought I heard you the other night, but it may have been the wind having something of its own it wished to make a noise about. When or where can I see these two wonderful masterworks that have put you into such excellent spirits?

I’m glad you liked the poems in the Can Forum. Four others are scheduled for appearance in the winter no. of the Tam Review1, and QQ has taken a revised version of the Kennedy poem2 I think I sent you but am not sure. The latter is a fine thing now and makes an important addition to "A Wind Out Of Hades". Wilson has just written me he’s taken five more poems (he calls them my "Dark Lady cycle") and they’ll probably appear in the February issue.3 How did you like the "beautiful" send-off Bannerman4 gave my poems?5 The poor fellow can’t forgive himself for being a hack. I still remember his tears of repentance at the Kingston conference and his resolution to write something worthwhile. Both were made of water. It makes the skin crawl to have
someone like himself speak about my poems. I want to throw up.

Some good news. About two years ago I gave a reading at Le Hibou, Ottawa. Someone taped it at the time and a few weeks ago a Mr Harvey from Ottawa heard the tapes. They so impressed him he decided to make an LP of them and put it on the market. About a week ago his representative came to see me about contracts and to let me hear the edited tape. The "audience participation" is stupendous. It was one of the better readings I've given, and some of my off-the-cuff remarks are hilarious. With good distribution, the record ought to sweep the country. No one will ever be able to read poetry again like Dylan Thomas—not even Dylan Thomas himself, were he alive. My record bridges the gulf between the cabaret and the classroom. A pity it couldn't be readied for Xmas. It would have put all the puritans and primfaces to rout. It puts poetry where it ought to be, right in the middle of our concerns; it takes it out of the pallid hands of the professors and gives it back to the people. Chaucer would have approved.

America will go on being liberal, democratic, and progressive though Kennedy is dead and a good part of me lies buried with him. It is America's destiny, and lucky the rest of the world is too that it is. But the style is gone. The shine is still there, but it's the shine of tinfoil now. Re-read my "preface" to Balls, etc and my "Elegy for Marilyn Monroe". I prophesied it all months ago. Our atmosphere is poisoned. The bright, the gallant, the brave, they cannot survive in it. The "Zed-factor".

Of course Johnson will be the Dem candidate in the next election. Will he win? It depends on who runs against him, who the Republicans put up. My guess is that Nixon will make it. The Republicans haven't a chance with either Rockefeller or Goldwater, they've a very good one with Nixon. My reason for thinking so is that by a curious twist of guilt or sympathy the American people might decide to elect the man who debated with Kennedy and gave him so close a running. They might do it, you understand, out of homage to the late President; as if they were saying, "Nixon was the next best thing to you." And it wouldn't grieve me if Nixon were elected. He's a complex, Dostoievskian character whom failure has taught a great deal about himself and the world. I think he'd surprise everyone by making an extraordinary president. He's had to come up the hard way; he wasn't born a god as J.F.K was. Nixon in some ways resembles Lincoln. Both are introverted, complex, shifty. Both knew poverty and humiliation. And both have guts. How's that for heresy?

Love,
Irving

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1See 479.2.

2"On the Assassination of President Kennedy," Queen's Quarterly 70.4 (winter 1963): 514.

James Bannerman, radio commentator and journalist based in Toronto.


On November 3, 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson defeated Senator Barry Goldwater in a landslide victory with the largest majority of popular votes in American history.

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January 6, 1964

Dear Irving,

You will think I am a slob for not answering your letter of December 24 before this. Believe it or not, I have been as busy as usual over the so-called holiday. I was marking exams right up to Christmas Eve, and once Christmas day was over I had to tackle the accumulated correspondence of the graduate school. I am seriously thinking of resigning as Dean of GS—it is a killing job. Dozens of students write in every day from all over the world, and though most of them can be answered with a form letter, the mere task of opening & sorting their letters is a full morning's work. There should really be a university-trained secretary to do all this routine work, but instead all that I have is a little stenographer fresh out of Business College who has to [be] guided through each stage of the process. Your vision of the professor as a dweller in a rarefied ivory tower atmosphere couldn't be less true of my existence today—and the growth of universities makes my lot only too common.

I am sending you (separately) the first draft of my "introduction" to the contemporary section of the Literary History of Canada. I know that there are weaknesses in it that will have to be repaired, but rather than tell you what I think is wrong with it I invite your criticisms. Please send the ms back when you have read it.

Glad to hear the news of the recording of the Ottawa reading. When shall I be able to buy the record? I shall look forward to it eagerly. But perhaps you don't want it to get into the "pallid hands of professors"! Honestly, why don't you get off that tack? It's so silly to waste your time berating professors, who make up a good percentage of your own friends & admirers.
Your mention of David Silverberg's store of anecdotes reminds me of two good ones I heard at a party the other night.

Our provincial minister of labour,3 a great raconteur, tells this one--He was in Ottawa recently for some federal-provincial conference, & one evening a friend from New Brunswick said to him "Why don't we go out & get ourselves a couple of girls tonight?"

"Oh", said the minister, "I'm twenty years too old for that kind of thing."

"Well," said the other, "as a matter of fact I was only joking. Personally I don't go for that kind of thing. In fact, I didn't even have intercourse with my wife before I married her. Did you?"

"I don't know, what was her maiden name?"

To change the subject, slightly, we were delighted to hear of Aviva's pregnancy & of the fact that conception probably occurred during our weekend visit. Long life & great luck to Fanny Hill Layton!

Read your political remarks with interest & general agreement. What I would like to discuss in letters for a while is the still more basic problem of the values by which men should & can live in the present world. Although you shout your faith in the dionysian way, it seems to me that you are never very clear or subtle in defining it or in recognizing its limitations. The physical ecstasies of sex & drink etc are certainly good things, but do they really provide the basis of a faith to live by? After all we cannot spend all our time having orgasms & getting pleasantly "high". As Yeats pointed out "in dreams begin responsibilities"4, and this is as true of the orgasm (which is a kind of high dream) as of any other form of dream.

There are dozens of questions that occur to me along this path of thought, but I must get on with my work now & leave the rest to you. And if you do attempt to answer, for god's sake try to be clear & exact & relevant & not to subject me to a drench of cloudy misty rhetoric of your usual variety. I don't want to be faked as if I were a love-sick sophomore in one of your classes.

Hugs & kisses ad infinitum (for Aviva!)

As ever,

Des

1Misdated 1963.

2See 484.2.


4W.B. Yeats, epigraph, Responsibilities (1914).

[s.c.]: "Literature and Society" (Introduction to "Contemporary Section" of Literary History of Canada)
Dear Desmond,

This afternoon I mailed off your essay and my criticisms of it.1 If I’ve voiced them somewhat harshly and stridently, please overlook it—I mayn’t have, but if I have, put it down to my present troubled state of mind. I’ve been out of sorts lately, perhaps because I’m carrying too heavy a load of responsibility and work. Or it may be owing to the exacting demands of my work, plus the fact that I’ve just finished another book of poems and just can’t bear any abstract talk about poetry and literature. The mood will doubtless pass, but right now it’s of the blackest.

Your essay is a fine survey of what has been written during the last four decades. It’s well-written, interesting and informative. Some of my criticisms, I think, are germane, but that’s for you to decide.

But please overlook the carping tone that may have crept into them. I’m really very flattered that you think highly enough of me to let me see your paper and ask for my criticisms.

Did you mention Leacock and Service in your paper? I don’t recall your doing so.

Why do I pick on the professors? Because I envy them, I suppose. The peace and serenity, I imagine they have. I’ve had to pay too great a price for my poems—in madness, disorder, and suffering.

Love,
Irving

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Dear Irving,

Fortunately your mollifying letter arrived two days before the "Introduction", or I should have been absolutely desolate. It’s bad enough anyway. You have ripped my poor little effort to shreds and virtually destroyed my ego in the process.

I’m very sorry to hear you are in a black mood, although in a way I find it reassuring. It makes you more human. When you have told me in the past that you were always cheerful & optimistic, I have felt that you were quite beyond my comprehension.

To come to the chapter. Many of your strictures are probably justified, and I wish we could spend a day together going over the thing carefully & deciding just where it really is weak & where you have merely misconceived my intention.

That you have to some extent misconceived my intention seems apparent from your letter & from some of the annotations on the chapter. For instance, in the letter you
say "Your essay is a fine survey of what has been written during the last four decades," and ask whether I mentioned Leacock & Service. Now it isn't intended as a survey of what has been written--a detailed history, critique & analysis of the prose, poetry & drama of the period follows my chapter. What I was writing in this chapter was essentially a prelude to the literary history of the last forty years. Perhaps a better title would be "The Literary Atmosphere, 1920-60" or "The Literary Environment" or "The Writer on (in?) the Canadian Scene." Before getting down to the business of critical analysis, I was in effect saying "Now here are the sort of things that were happening in Canada during these forty years, here are the magazines in which the work could be published, here are the main controversies that erupted, here are some of the trends that developed."

I think you're probably right in saying that my treatment of Canadian society is superficial, or at least it is too superficial to justify my title. Certainly it isn't a penetrating essay on the sociology of Canada. It wasn't meant to be. It was meant to be a sketch of social & cultural conditions in which the writing was produced. I'm not really equipped for real social analysis. But I do think you're wrong to say that I treat literature as a social science. Nowhere do I say that literature is a product of society. All I say is that literary developments—e.g., volume of published books—are to some extent conditioned by economic factors.

And what you call my Punch & Judy show (nationalism vs cosmopolitanism) is not mine: it was the chief continuing literary controversy of the period in Canada, as it was also in Australia. I couldn't give an honest account of the period & not emphasize that point—it was the chief issue at stake between the Montreal Group & the Toronto Bookman crowd, it was the chief issue at stake (if the rival editorials can be believed) between the First Statement group & the Preview group, it is reflected in Smith's Book of CV with its "Cosmopolitan Tradition" & "Nationalist Tradition." Such a controversy may have been silly but it was real, & it was almost inevitable in a society such as ours in which a national consciousness was in process of development.

At one point you ask what I mean by "literature". Well, of course I know what "literature" is in the strict sense, & that it has absolutely nothing to do with the effusions of The Canadian Bookman & The Canadian Poetry Magazine. But, as the "preface" to the whole book will make clear, we decided that for this "Literary History of Canada" we were going to use literature in the broad sense of all literary activity, of the bad books as well as the good—setting out to see just what had been turned out in this country. Sometimes bad books can be fun, can even be significant.
You keep asking me what I mean by "literary nationalism". Isn't that abundantly clear from the examples I give? Aren't all those speeches & lecture tours, those "Summer Schools of Canadian Literature", those Canadian Book Weeks & Canadian Book Fairs all examples of literary nationalism?

Some of your comments are merely bad-tempered. Others are very shrewd. I wish you could help me sort out the two categories. Why berate me, for example, for Patrick Anderson's blathering? I was merely quoting him to show the kind of guff he emitted about the writer & the war. That's literary history, isn't it? I'm not setting myself up as a judge here—I'm the historian. I'm saying in effect "This is the kind of thing that was being said"—I don't have to agree or disagree, though I hope I imply something of my own values.

One matter of fact. You claim Anderson had very little influence & that Scott, Smith, Page etc would have written anyway. Well, Frank Scott told me that Anderson was a tremendous catalyst at that time, that he stirred them all up by his energy & enthusiasm. Who's right?

You question the significance of the Fiddlehead. Well, the Fiddlehead provided the medium for Bailey, Cogswell, Brewster & Nowlan, & as an occasional medium for almost every other poet in Canada. I bet its roster of published poets would outdo any other magazine of the time except The Forum. Why pick on the Fiddlehead? I know it has its weaknesses, but then what magazine hasn't?

Well--enough for now.

Love to Aviva,
Hate to you,
Desmond Pacey

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1 Pacey's introduction to the twentieth century section of the first edition of the Literary History of Canada ("The Writer and his Public") was originally titled "Literature and Society."


497.[pc:ts] February 16, 1964
Dear Desmond,

I missed your phone-call by five minutes. Why didn't you let us know you were going to pass through? I'd have been at the station to meet you and Mary. Forgive my silence these past few weeks, but I've been living through something of a nightmare. In between spasms of bafflement and terror I've managed to write a 4,500 word "preface" to The Laughing Rooster as well as a dozen poems. I sent the mss off to McStew about one week ago—seventy-five poems and the "Preface". Gave a reading at McMaster, very successful. And bought an apartment-building valued at
eighty-eight thousand. As well as holding down three teaching jobs. Don't ask me how I’ve done all this and managed to keep sane. Maybe I ain’t! But sane or nutty, believe me always your devoted friend. I think the worst is over. Will write you a long letter soon.

Love,
Irving

1See 498.


3Layton, poetry reading, McMaster University, Hamilton, 9 February 1964.

February 21, [1964]

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your postcard, ambiguous & tantalizing as it is. What on earth can have been going on to lead you to describe your life as a nightmare & to speak of "bafflement & terror"? I hope you were exaggerating.

I wish we could have seen you during our brief stopover in Montreal, but our plans for such meetings have so often gone astray that I hesitated to bother you again. I was going up to serve on the Canada Council Selection Committee for fellowships etc in English, and for a meeting of the Plans & Publications Committee of the Royal Society of Canada.

I am chairman of the Programme Committee for the annual meetings of the Royal Society which are to be held in Charlottetown next June, and the correspondence involved in that has kept me very busy during the past few weeks.

The editors of The Literary History of Canada are also involved in a very heavy correspondence at the moment, as our book goes to press in mid-March. We are having our final editorial meeting in Ottawa on March 7, so I expect to be in Montreal again between trains on Sunday March 8 from 6:45 to 7:45 p.m. (Windsor Station) on my way back from Ottawa to Fredericton.

Incidentally, in spite of your hostile comments, all the other editors—Frye, Bissell, Klinck, Daniels & Bailey—have described my introduction to the modern period as "excellent", "brilliant" etc etc. In deference to your critique, however, I have changed the title from "Literature & Society" to "The Writer & His Public", and I am re-writing parts of it.

I am so swamped with routine work these days, however, that I get almost no time for writing. I have been heavily involved not only in correspondence on Royal Society, Canada Council & Literary History matters, but also over the business of getting new staff for next year and that of accepting or rejecting the hundreds of candidates from all over the world who want to do graduate work here. In addition I teach two courses--Creative Writing & 17th C Lit--so my spare moments are negligible.
I yearn for the summer when I hope at last to get to work on my Cambridge notes.

Do you think there would be any point at all in considering the publication of our letters along the lines of the Henry Miller-Lawrence Durrell correspondence?¹ Perhaps the idea has no merit at all, but it seems to me that our letters between 1952² and 1962 would have some interest for Canadians, since we debated most of the literary & political issues as they came up. We should have to edit them of course to take out matters that might be too personal—although I’d be in favour of the maximum degree of frankness consonant with discretion. What do you think? Would it be worth querying Jack McClelland?

Love to yourself & Aviva. Mary is thriving.

As ever,
Des

²Pacey is here guessing at the date of the onset of their correspondence; see 533.1.

[sc February 29, 1964]: "Les Juifs Face a la Nouvelle Realite Quebecoise" La Presse, 29 February 1964: 16.
[marginalia:] Leonard Cohen recently participated in a panel discussion concerning the future of Judaism. He was outspoken, the rabbis are still fluttering with terror.

Between the two of us we’re giving a lot of the "right people" some bad dreams. Hooray for Cohen! Hooray for Layton!

[above photographs of Layton and Samuel Bronfman]: The Two Faces of Modern Jewry!

March 1, 1964

Dear Desmond,

Glad February has come and gone. On top of all my regular duties, I had three out-of-town reading and speaking engagements as well as the "preface" for The Laughing Rooster to write. I think it’s been the busiest four weeks I’ve ever spent in my whole life. And as I wrote you in my post-card, I had some real estate business to attend to (Frost’s "Provide, Provide"¹) which finally culminated in my purchasing an apartment building—my biggest financial venture to date. I’ve sunk a good part of my savings into it, and it could turn into a bonanza or a bust. I hope it will be the former. About a year ago, or it may be two years ago, I told you I wanted to be independent so that I need never be afraid of speaking my thoughts—and it’s that I’m after, not great wealth, though I don’t doubt that if I put my peculiar business talents into the making of money I
could end up this country’s first millionaire poet. But
that’s not my ambition—not yet, anyway!

When you’re in Montreal I’ll tell you all about my
nightmare. It’s not something I can fairly put down on
paper unless I were weaving it into a short story or a
novel. Some poems I’ve already extracted from it, and
you’ll be seeing them in The Laughing Rooster which McStew
plans to publish this coming September. But the poems are
hit-and-run affairs, ejaculations rather than the
omniscient, compassionate things I want them to be. Perhaps
this summer I’ll be able to climb the mountain-top where the
poems that unite justice and truth get written.

Of course your article was a good thing, but I’m sure
you didn’t send it to me to hear me say that. You want
criticism and not praise, and if anything I said, however
ill-tempered my manner of saying it may have been, helped at
all it’s surely something we can both be happy about. I
think the change of title was a wise move on your part.
Many of my objections become irrelevant as soon as you don’t
pretend you’re dealing with literature and society. Apart
from that, your major error lay in attributing more
importance to both Anderson and Sutherland than they really
deserved. I’ve ticked you off before on this, but you go on
your merry, obstinate way heedless of what I tell you and
what I feel and know to be the truth. Did Anderson
influence A.M. Klein, or Smith, or even P.K. Page? I don’t
think so. The only one he really influenced in any marked
way was F.R. Scott, but the latter has always been rather
impressionable. As for Sutherland’s Marxism, etc I’ve
repeatedly told you what lay behind it, and even what lay
behind his Catholicism, but for some reason known only to
yourself you will not debate the matter with me but keep on
asseverating the same asininities on every opportunity you
get. There’s a blind spot in you somewhere, fortified and
embossed by a peculiar complacent stubbornness that prevents
you from seeing things clearly: as, for example, when in
reviewing The Swinging Flesh you blandly asserted though the
proof to the contrary was staring you in the face that I had
lost my faith in Poetry, Marxism, and even Sex! Even Sex!
My subsequent writing since then, if The Swinging Flesh
itself doesn’t, ought to make you realize what egregious
reviews you are at times capable of writing.

But you’re a good man and I love you. Your heart’s in
the right place, and for me that’s all that really matters.

I’ll be waiting for you at the Windsor Station next
week at 6:45 PM If necessary cover yourself with luminous
paint. This time we must make it, otherwise I’ll think you
or the gods are playing tricks on me. Over a cup of coffee
we can discuss your idea of publishing our correspondence.
Offhand, of course, the idea’s very appealing. Jack McStew
might be interested in it. But I foresee a lot of hard
thought going into it before we come up with something
satisfactory.
I promise never to be so remiss in my correspondence with you again. Keep well and happy, my friend. All my love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

"Better to go down dignified/ With boughten friendship by your side/ Than none at all.

Dear Desmond,
The greatest part of my nightmare is that I love Aviva with everything I’ve got. One writes poetry or fiction because things are inexpressible. We are owned by forces that don’t know us and don’t wish to: when we try to know them we either crack up or write masterpieces.

To change the subject, and yet not to, Max has begun to write some wonderful poetry. I sent him to visit his mother and while in San Francisco he wrote about thirty poems. Those he sent me are first-rate. He plans to return to Montreal after a stint of work in Vancouver, and to live with me. He’s grown into radiant manhood. I’m very proud of him.

Love,
Irving

enclosure: offprint "On the Assassination of President Kennedy" Queen’s Quarterly, Winter, 1964 [For Desmond Pacey, With affection & respect, Irving Layton.]

Dear Irving,
Thank you for the undated offprint from Queen’s Quarterly & the note on the back. Thank you also for coming down to the station to meet me--it was very enjoyable to see & talk with you, even if so very briefly.

I am terribly upset about your relations with Aviva. It all seems so sad & so incomprehensible to me. You have both seemed so happy when I was in your company. I don’t know what to say, & that is partly why I haven’t written for so long.

Another reason is that I am having difficulties in my own family. We now have four teenagers, all the way from thirteen to nineteen, & they are all rebelling busily against Mary & me. I know this process is inevitable, but when you get four people attacking at once, & you’re already strained by overwork, the effect is almost overwhelming. Mary Ann, 19, & a sophomore here, claimed she wanted to spend the summer in Cambridge visiting her English boyfriend; I made all the arrangements, & now she refuses to go, claiming she no longer loves the English boy & has a boyfriend here. It sounds silly & is--but each one of them
is presenting similar problems & I am very near exhaustion. I guess I was spoiled by having such a good eldest son—Philip—& am not prepared for the deceit, lying, double-crossing etc with which I am being assaulted by the next group.

Sorry to be so gloomy!

Love,
Des

502.[pc] April 1, 1964
Dear Desmond,

Since I’m leaving for New York this evening I’ll send you this PC as an installment on the letter I’ll write you when I return. I shall be in NY for a couple of days. Aviva is coming along with me—all is warm and sunny again—and we shall take in the current crop of plays on and off-Broadway.

If I’ve been rather snappish lately, please excuse. I’ve really been under a very great strain for the last few years. I think the worst is over. Aviva is a splendid woman, but she is a good deal younger than I—and I’m not the easiest man to live with. One good thing that’s come out of it all is that I’ve got a deeper insight into myself. We’re very imperfect creatures, yes, but I intend to sing that news, not snivel it...You’re a great, good man, Desmond. Don’t exhaust yourself. This country needs you,

Irv

[s.c.](c April 8, 1964): ts "At the Iglesia de Sacromonte", "Silly Rhymes for Aviva", "My Queen, My Queen", "Encounter" The Laughing Rooster 70, 30-1, 73, 38.

503. April 11, 1964
Dear Irving,

I take it the bundle of poems that arrived yesterday are for possible use in The Literary Review. I like them all, & some of them very much indeed. But have none of them been previously published? I know I have read most of them before, but perhaps it was simply in ms. I ask, because one of the ground rules is the stuff must be published for the first time in the Literary Review.

I’m being inundated with material for the issue. I’ve just spent four straight hours acknowledging submissions from Acorn, Purdy, Anne Marriott, Ralph Gustafson, J.R. Colombo, Hugh Hood, Ron Bates etc etc etc.

Frank Scott is here at the moment. He was at our house till two this morning & I’m going out to have lunch with him in a few minutes. What vitality at 65!

I am so so happy to hear you & Aviva have patched it up. Cheers!
Do write when you have a minute. I’m so busy these last weeks of term that I’m almost mad—but by mid-May things will be quieter.

Love & kisses,
Des

1The bundle included the poems above and other unidentified poems Pacey returned (see 505).

2Literary Review 8:4 Summer 1965 (Canada Number: compiled by Desmond Pacey) contained two essays: "The Canadian Imagination," by Desmond Pacey (437-444) and "Manitoba," by Gabrielle Roy, stories by Joan Finnegan, Hugh Hood, Henry Kreisel, Claire Martin and Wilfred Watson, and work by forty-one poets including Layton ("Beauty" and "Strange Turn" 547).

3Hugh Hood (b. 1928), prolific Canadian novelist (The Swing in the Garden 1975) and short story writer (Flying a Red Kite 1962; None Genuine Without This Signature 1980).

4F.R. Scott, poetry reading, University of New Brunswick, 10 April 1964.

Dear Desmond,

None of the poems I sent you have appeared in any mag, big or little, but you heard me read several of them when you were at my place last. I’m glad you like them—your enthusiasm for my work never fails to give me a lift. Some of those poems I did send to the Canadian Forum, but I’ve had no word from Milton Wilson what he wants to take. If you can let me know very early which of them you intend to use, I can let Milton know and get him to return them to me. There’s one poem I’d like you to have had—"Creation"—but Birney has taken it for Prism. I think it’s among the best love lyrics I’ve ever written. A short piece, no more than 10 or 14 lines, but it really moves the way a love poem ought to. It’s got the stamp of authority written all over it.

All’s well, finally and I hope for good, between Aviva and me. It’s hard to be a poet, and harder, I suppose, to be married to one. As you know, I’ve always maintained that a poet must take risks and be prepared to pay a price to see that his sensibility doesn’t go stale in him. He must adventure into new and strange modes of feeling or become a tame cat, spouting oratund pieties. Perhaps "cats" mixes up my metaphor badly. Let’s say "eunuchs" then. If and when I decide I’m no longer willing to pay the price, I shall stop writing poems and tell all my friends including yourself, never to mention poetry in my presence. Everything else but intense living and the writing that makes possible, I consider literary palaver, "culture". Don’t misunderstand me here. In the classroom I can be as academic as the next fellow, but as someone who has lived, suffered, enjoyed, and written while "on the run" so to speak, I know the difference between the two activities; and if sometimes I
bore or irritate you by insisting on that difference it’s surely because better than anyone else, in this country, anyhow, I’ve had the chance to apprehend that difference. Any poetry that’s worth anything, that’s going to mean anything to anybody and be remembered comes from an excited awareness of the beauty and terror of existence. I’m fifty-two now. Few poets have so consistently and unremittingly tried to become acquainted with those "terrible truths" as I have for the past quarter-of-a-century. You’d be close to the mark if you thought of me as a cold-blooded scientist who deliberately injects a malevolent virus into himself to study its effects. If that sounds too clinical, let me add that the experiment in "controlled irrationality" has yielded me experiences that no one could have predicted and insights and emotions I could have had in no other way. I was determined that middle-age was not going to douse my flame as it has so many of my contemporaries. Life is what I’m after. I have a never-to-be-satisfied curiosity about the stretch of human emotions. For me that’s the real stuff of poetry; everything else is commentary. I’ve little use for that monstrous hybrid, "philosophical poetry"--if I want philosophy or religion I know where I can get it pure. From the philosophers and mystics. Narrative poetry in our day of TV and movies is boring and archaic. Which leaves only the lyric--which is fine, since that’s the authentic core of all true poetry. So to cut back to what I was saying before--no emotion, no poetry. So much of contemporary poetry strikes me as being devoid of feeling, or a sterile harangue that wishes to cover up for the absence of personal experience.

But let me stop here, or I’ll end up writing an essay. News? I see Leonard Cohen almost every week; have wonderful talks with him. I’ve written a long letter in reply to M Richler’s piece which Holiday will be printing in July. Rosenthal has taken three poems for his anthology of modern English poetry. My LP record should be out very soon. Gwen McEwen spent a couple of nights with us--she’s got something tho’ I can’t say what it is yet. The New York trip was a great success. Saw Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf. Moderately impressed. Also Bergman’s The Silence. Tremendous. Love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving

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Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of April 13. In fairness to you, I’m returning some of your poems. I just couldn’t possibly print all of these in the space I shall have. But may I have first call on the ones I am keeping? They are "At the Iglesia de Sacromante" (the most powerful & succinct of the lot, I feel), "Silly Rhymes for Aviva", "For My Green Old Age", "My Queen, My Queen", and "Encounter". I should certainly like to use all these five, if I could. And by the way, what do you think of my selection? Have I again betrayed my lack of taste?

Delighted to hear that all is well at home, and that you enjoyed the trip to NYC. Mary & I are very anxious to see The Silence. Any chance of it coming to Montreal?

For, all being well, I (& possibly Mary too) will be in Montreal May 26-27 for the twentieth anniversary dinner of the Humanities Research Council of Canada. There is a dinner the night of May 26, but after the dinner I should like to go night-clubbing with you and see acres of naked flesh. By the way, have you seen the current issue of the new Vancouver magazine Limbo? There’s a splendid sexual poem in it by Ewart Milne. (Spring is the mischief in me these days & I go around a very Maupassant, in a constant state of erection.

Under separate cover I am sending you the current issue of the Atlantic Advocate, which contains my little horse story. How do you like it? I can’t decide whether it’s very good or very bad—it’s certainly different. I was aiming for a kind of real naïveté, a series of simple perceptions which would cause their own reverberations as if by accident. Does it work at all for you?

Love,
Des

PS Have you moved or simply changed your number?

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1Limbo, a literary magazine produced by the Neo-Surrealist Research Foundation of Vancouver, was edited by William Martin; twenty issues appeared monthly until the magazine’s demise in 1967.

3Ewart Milne (1903-87), Irish poet and journalist, author of Letter from Ireland (1940) and Drift of Pinions (1976).


506.[pc] April 20, 1964
"Read as little as possible of aesthetic criticism: such things are either partisan views, petrified and grown senseless in their lifeless induration, or they are clever quibblings in which today one view wins and tomorrow the opposite. Works of art are of an infinite loneliness and with nothing so little to be reached as with criticism. Only love can grasp and hold and fairly judge them." Rilke.¹


507.[pc] April 20, 1964
Dear Desmond,
I'm most happy about the selection you've made. I think you've chosen the best five of the lot, and I share your opinions about the "Iglesia" poem. It is the strongest poem in the collection, and I rejoice at your perspicacity. Birney, however, has just written me he wants it for a small obscure mag called L'Envoi¹: would it really matter terribly if it appeared in it or shall I tell him to return the poem to me? According to the leaflet you sent, your sponsors don't mind publishing a poem which has appeared in an obscure mag with a small circulation. However, let me know.
I'll be reading your story tomorrow, and I'm very much looking forward to it. Will write you a long letter during the week. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

¹See 504.1 (Layton is thinking of Prism).

508. April 27, 1964
Dear Desmond,
Have just finished reading "The Life and Death of Morning Star". Your story certainly helps to establish the fact that man is a horse's best friend. Aside from that, what else are you trying to say, to prove? That even a colt as lovely as "Morning Star" ends up in a glue-pot, after
having had his beautiful rebelliousness knocked out of him, so that he grows into a common cart-horse whose sole remaining distinction is that he can pull harder than his yoke-mate?

I imagine that is the "moral" you want your readers to extract from your story, but I doubt whether you've been altogether successful in running it from the pulpit. In brief, I think it wears a somewhat sermonizing air, it comes through as a parable rather than as a dramatic construction.

Apart from this general criticism, there are two or three flaws in the narrative itself. For instance, you make much of the Sire's inheritance in Morning Star, but you barely caught more than a glimpse of him, since you were sent down into the cellar by your prudish (or prudent) mother. Of course you might reply that you learned more about him later on when you grew into adolescence and manhood. Fair enough. Still, a sentence or two to indicate that would help to round out the tale.

Though I think I know what you're striving for in the ending (Sex and Death), it strikes me as being just a little too contrived, too pat. There's a sentiment abroad against short stories locking with such a loud click. Taoism\(^1\) has penetrated the contemporary consciousness of the West—an appreciation of the incomplete, of flux. We're through with poems like Keats' "Ode To A Grecian Urn"\(^2\); we want an unending line, preferably broken and at times invisible, rather than circles that hint at the perfection of death.

An avoidance of life, that is, change, inevitably leads to sentimentality. Did you really "stay in the house"; did you "really" shut the door against the sound of that dead and final clatter? I don't believe you. And if you did, or you want me to believe you did, you are an Anglo-Saxon sentimentalist who cannot bear to look life in the face and see the wrinkles forming under the radiant eyes. After all, for a horse, Morning Star had a good life: what did you expect, that he'd live forever? Would you want him to? It's bad enough that humans want to clutch and possess that which will not stay without projecting on animals the same bad habits of thought and feeling, their own dualisms and sentimentalities. And this, I believe, is what your story adds up to: at any rate, that's the moral I extract from it, though I doubt it's the one you intended, or that your parishioners would approve of.

Not much news. Aviva and I have amicably agreed to disagree. It's better this way. My life has suddenly taken on a wholeness all my peevish days and years were only a long preparation for. Now I am truly blessed, truly free. All my love to Mary.

Hugs,  
Irving

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\(^1\)Taoism is a Chinese religion and philosophy which exalts naturalness and simplicity, the securing of solace in misfortune by the cultivation of an inward calm, and skepticism of doctrinaire programs.
"And the moral laws?... Why was it precisely sin, surrender to the harmful and the consuming, actually seemed to him more moral than any amount of wisdom and frigid self-discipline? Not that constituted morality: not the contemptible knack of keeping a good conscience--rather the struggle and compulsion, the passion and pain."

"A Weary Hour"--Thomas Mann

Dear Desmond,

I hope my criticism, or anything in the tone of it, didn’t put you off. Surprised I’ve not heard from you. I’m all set for the acres of flesh. Aviva and I will take you to them. Pregnant women are awfully sexy. Bear with me.

Hugs,

Irving


Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of April 27 & your postcard of May 11.

No--I’m not mad at you or anything--just have been incredibly busy. Tomorrow is our graduation ceremony, & I’ve been caught up in all the final hustle of theses, orals, committees, faculty meetings, dinners of this & luncheons of that. Then too submissions have been pouring in for the Literary Review--three or four packets of poems & stories a day--& I’ve had to read them all & acknowledge them.

I arrive Montreal on May 26 by a flight leaving here at 9:15 a.m. and arriving Dorval at 9:50 a.m., & return the following evening. I shall be staying at the Ritz. I look forward lecherously to the acres of flesh. Meet me at the airport if you can.

Re the story--you took it much too seriously. I wasn’t aiming at any moral--I just wanted to try a simple picture of the cycle of birth & death--to see how near one could come to absolute simplicity without falling into a false naïveté. Perhaps I failed. But where do you see the pulpit? I certainly wasn’t trying to preach anything. As for the sire, a glimpse of a stallion & the mere sound of its snortings as it mounts a mare are enough to impress a boy for life--as I can testify. As for the ’pat ending’--why should I care that the fashion now is for unresolved endings? A truck brought his seed and a truck took his
bones—that happened, that’s the way I saw it, & who cares for fashion?

And what’s sentimental about a boy shutting the door when his favourite horse is trucked off to a glue factory? Can one never wince? Must one always stare death boldly in the face? What kind of neo-Stoicism are you promoting? The fact that nothing lives for ever doesn’t entirely remove death’s sting, & you well know it.

You let me down about this story, because you asked all the wrong questions. You should have asked & answered the question: does this simple story move me, or is it faux-naïf?1

But no hard feelings—obviously the story doesn’t come off. But could one write a successful story about such a simple subject? Yes—because you, you devil, pulled it off in "The Bull Calf".2

Yours for mammalian acres!

Love,
Des

1French: falsely naive.

2See 10.3.


511. June 1, 1964
Dear Irving,

Your latest poem—"Conference Man"—to hand this morning. Is this supposed to be a serious commentary on our latest meeting? Are you really hurt that I did not ask you about your "latest poem" & "difficult life"? I don’t see why you should be. When was there an opportunity? You know how hectic that night was—Purdy etc shouting at your house, the noise of the bands in the two nightclubs etc. We scarcely had a chance to talk at all. I had hoped that there would be an opportunity to talk the next day at supper—but my meeting did not end until 5:30 and I had to leave for the airport at 6:15—so just had time to go back to my hotel room & pack.

I am terribly sorry if you feel resentful about our meeting. I so much enjoyed the gyrations of the three girls at the Harlem Paradise that I look back on the whole occasion with much pleasure.

Of course the poem is quite inaccurate—I wasn’t ‘chairing’ a conference, & we weren’t discussing the future of poetry, but the future of humanistic studies. But that’s not important...

Please write soon and say whether the poem is simply a light-hearted jeu d’esprit or a genuine expression of annoyance. I hope it’s only the former. My love to Aviva.

As ever, Des P
512. [June 3, 1964]
Dear Desmond,

Since you have a positive talent for misinterpreting my views (cf: your review of The Swinging Flesh) I'm sending you this.

Hugs,
Irving

PS Your letter just in. Silly man, of course my poem was just a bit of light-hearted spoofing. Will write you this week. Love to Mary.

Irv


513. June 3, 1964
Dear Irving,

Fred tells me that this poem is in the Spring issue of the Fiddlehead,¹ so I am returning it to you. I am holding, & hope to print in The Literary Review, "Iglesia", "Silly Rhymes for Aviva", "My Queen, My Quean" & "Encounter". Are these all clear of other entanglements?

Mary & I have about five hours in Montreal on Wednesday, June 10, en route to England. We arrive at the airport at 3:55 and get the London plane at 8. Any chance of seeing you, or are you still mad at me?

I'm madly trying to get all my work caught up before going to England. I have gone over all the Literary Review material several times & have pretty well made up my mind what to print. Every Canadian poet of any stature has sent in stuff--& many of little stature. The sad thing is that there doesn't seem to be a single good poet under 30. I should love to represent 'les jeunes' but where are their poems?² The stuff I got from Boxer,³ Coleman,⁴ Pearson, Davey,⁵ Bowering⁶ etc would make us look like laughing-stocks abroad.

Love & kisses,
Des

¹Irving Layton, "For My Green Old Age," Fiddlehead 60 (Spring 1964): 20.
³Avi Boxer (b. 1932), Montreal television script writer and producer of documentary films, poet, author of No Address (1971).
⁵Frank Davey (b. 1940), a founder of Tish, Open Letter and Swift Current, editor, critic (Surviving the Paraphrase: Eleven Essays on Canadian Literature 1983, Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster 1980), and poet (Arcana 1975).
George Bowering (b. 1935), poet (Rocky Mountain Foot 1968; Allophones 1976), novelist (Burning Water 1980), editor and essayist (The Mask in Place: Essays on Fiction in North America 1982), Professor of English at Simon Fraser University.

514.

June 6, 1964

Dear Desmond,

I honestly don’t remember sending Cogswell "For My Green Old Age." Has the poem already appeared in The Fiddlehead or is it going to appear in the Spring issue? If the latter, I’d most certainly prefer that you should have it, and you can tell Fred I’d send him another poem equally good to replace it.

What you say about the young poets in Canada agrees with my own feeling about them. They seem a dispirited lot, with not very much to say, though quite inventive in mannerism, for not saying what they haven’t got to say. The Tishbites¹ have been ruined by an excessive interest in prosody and by the influence of Olson, Creeley and Levertov.² However, had Davey, Bowering et al been true poets they would have assimilated the influence and eventually found their own voice-levels. But a poet is a teacher, and these have no doctrine in them. The desire to make fastidious bric-a-brac, all the coquettings with words and line-placements will not conceal the empty heart. If a man urgently wishes to improve the lot of his fellow-men, the quality of their lives, he’ll discover or invent the means for reaching them—always presupposing he has the necessary talent with words without which, of course, his good intentions will count for nil.

Jonathan Cape have committed themselves to publishing a book of mine.³ They wrote McClelland and Stewart they were very interested in my work and wanted an "option" (that’s the publisher’s jargon) on my poems. As yet they’re undecided whether to publish The Laughing Rooster in England or a selection of my poems. I hope they decide on the latter, since the whole idea is to introduce me to the British public. I’ll know by the middle of July what they decided on.

I imagine they’ll get some well-known English poet to write an introduction, probably somebody like Roy Fuller or George Barker.¹ I’ll be the first Canadian poet, I think, who’ll have the distinction of having been written about by an American (W.C. Williams) and an Englishman, (whatever his identity) while not a single full-length study of his work was undertaken by a single one of his contemporaries. And that’s the way I like it! If it were otherwise, I would not be I, and Canada would not be Canada.

Have you seen Herman Finer’s volume on the Suez episode?⁵ I wanted to send you a review of the book to rub your nose in it, but I thought that on top of the poem, it would be too much to be borne even by so patient an angel as yourself. You’ll recall the correspondence we had on the
Suez business, and how you and Frank Scott, being the fine liberals you both are, disagreed with the position I then took. Well, it seems that Finer, who’s both an excellent historian and political scientist, and who has thoroughly scrutinized all the relevant documents, is in full agreement with me and has nothing but a blistering contempt for the Americans and in particular for John Foster Dulles.

Whenever F.R. Scott takes up a political position, all one has to do is take up the contrary one and be proven right in the long run. No feeling for life in the man! Sterile intellectualism personified. That gray, rationalistic, goody-goodness that has undone the CCF and now the NDP. Not an atom of imagination. Just as he missed the real significance of the Hungarian and Suez episodes, he’s now failing to intuit what’s going on under his very nose, right here in Quebec. The man has a deep fear of life, a distrust of its unpredictable upsurges. He’s going around predicting fascism and blue ruin (the usual Socialistic balderdash) and repeats or encourages the nonsense that his friend Blair Fraser is writing in Macleans. There’s more wisdom and insight in a sentence in the article of mine I sent you than in all the Protestant, Anglo-Saxon blatherings of the Blair Frasers and Frank Scotts. They give me a pain in the ass!

Aviva and I would love to see you and Mary before you take off for England. Can you come to our place between flights? You can have an early supper and grab a taxi back to the airport. But I’ll give you a phone-call Monday night, and you can tell me your pleasure. Certainly I’d like to see you and we can tell each other all about our "difficult lives".

Love to Mary.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving

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1Tish was founded in Vancouver in September 1961 by editor Frank Davey and contributing editors James Reid, George Bowering, Fred Wah and David Dawson, to affirm the poetics of the "Black Mountain School" in Canada; the editorial makeup changed after issue 19 (14 Mar. 1963) and the magazine last appeared in mid-1969 (number 45).

2Denise Levertov (b. 1923), British-American poet, frequently associated with the Black Mountain school, author of Here and Now (1956) and Relearning the Alphabet (1970).

3Jack McClelland was negotiating with Jonathan Cape for an English volume of Layton’s poetry at this time, but Tom Maschler of Cape’s Board of Directors declined McClelland’s proposal in a letter of 14 January 1965.

4George Barker (1913-80), British poet, author of Eros in Dogma (1944) and The True Confession of George Barker (1950).

Blair Fraser (1909—), journalist, Ottawa editor of *Maclean's* (1943—), television commentator on the CBC.

Blair Fraser began contributing regular columns—"Overseas Report" and "Backstage in Ottawa"—to *Maclean's* magazine beginning in August 1962.


515. July 4, 1964

Dear Irving,

Got back here late Wednesday night & have spent three hectic days trying to clear up my desk. The letters had coupled with the memos to produce as foul & monstrous a breed as ever littered a desk!

Had a wonderful three weeks holiday in Britain—best holiday I’ve ever had. Must tell you all about it sometime.

Your article on the films very good & provocative—though I disagree with you almost entirely about The Silence, which we saw (& loved) in London. I think the main theme is human isolation & the ways in which we try to break through the barriers between us. Notice all the windows, corridors, closed doors etc which suggest this, & the way in which the boy wanders around looking for a way in (or out of his own prison). The dwarfs have found a kind of companionship by accepting & exploiting their own "difference" as a group—& they accept the boy at first as one of themselves. The neurotic spinster has rejected normal sex as a means of escape (I start when I was fertilized she says) & hence her masturbation & tentative lesbian—incest & death. The other sister sees sex as the only escape—& she does escape in a fashion. I could go on & on—but it’s a fascinating film.

Am too tired to write at length—but I still love you.

As ever,
Des

516. July 15, 1964

Dear Desmond,

Welcome back, honeymooner!

It was very good of you and Mary to come and see us before taking off for England. You both looked happy. Aviva and I bathed in that happiness for many days afterwards. You belong to a privileged minority. Very few people can look back to twenty-five years of growing achievement and satisfaction. You not only belong to a privileged minority, but to a vanishing species!

May the succeeding quarter-of-a-century be equally rich for you, and old age find you full of honours, surrounded by many friends—and in good health. You know what that means!
You’ve probably received my LP by now. Let me know what you think of it. It has several flaws. Some of the poems seem to run into each other, the pauses between them being too short. That however, was not my fault, but the fault of RCA Victor who did the pressing. They ignored the markers. Also, the cover is not entirely satisfactory. The publisher assures me both things will be remedied when the next batch of 500 records is released.

I’m living up to my resolution not to write any poetry this summer. Instead I’ve settled down to a fairly steady routine in which I spend several hours each day doing maths, French and philosophy. All three subjects are coming along fine. I’m reading Maupassant in the original, as well as Verlaine and Musset. Maths I intend to make a lifelong study—there’s Thinking for you, Thought. If I weren’t making off for San Francisco in a few weeks I’d hire a tutor in the subject, but I’ve a fairly good background which enables me to go a distance on my own. In the fall I’ll either get myself a tutor or register at the University. In philosophy I’ve begun to re-read Spinoza.

Have you looked into Max Dimont’s book Jews, God and History? I just finished it yesterday. It’s one of the most absorbing books I’ve ever read, combining impeccable scholarship and great readability.

I also have to get ready for this September’s teaching load. I’ll be giving a course in "Literature and the Modern World" at the YMHA in addition to my poetry course. That means re-reading Camus, Conrad, Unamuno, James, etc. I’m concentrating on ten or twelve short novels. And the Ross High School has instituted a Grade XII—first year university—and wants me to teach Medieval History as well as give the Survey course in English Lit. I’ve certainly got my work cut out for the coming year. But after that—well, it might be good-bye Canada.

Aviva is still very pregnant, but it’s any day now. We’ve got the nursery all prepared, and both of us are very much on the lookout. This will have been a fantastic year for me: LP record, baby (to come) and book The Laughing Rooster. I’m just a lucky guy.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving

PS Love to Mary.

remarkable. The very minor flaws you mention don't worry me at all.

You sound as if you have a full year ahead of you, with all those teaching assignments. It is probably a good thing that you are relaxing this summer by reading maths & philosophy & French.

I am working hard and with a kind of nervous desperation as usual. I am teaching two courses at Summer School—a fourth year course (8 o'clock every morning) on 20th C English Poetry, and a graduate course on Wordsworth and Keats. The teaching I love—I get such delight out of talking about each poem that I hate to leave it for the next one. It is all the other tasks which, especially in this heat, get me down—finding staff for the branch of the university we are opening in Saint John this fall, keeping up with the correspondence about The Literary Review (this has proved to be a much more arduous task than I had imagined), making the final editorial revisions in my high school literature anthology (now finally, after five years, nearing completion), ordering books & periodicals for the university library, and trying to sort out my Cambridge notes preparatory to writing a series of articles on the Canadian image in Britain.

We are throwing quite a big booze party in our garden this Saturday night—wish you & Aviva could fly down for the occasion. I may play your LP to our guests.

My single relaxation has been to play several games of cricket! I hadn't played cricket since 1931, when I played for my school under-fourteen team in England, but a group of expatriate Englishmen on our staff started to play here, & invited me to join them. I find that I am a much better batsman than I was thirty-three years ago—or perhaps the bowling is poorer!

Did I tell you about all the things Mary & I saw & did in England? The highlights for me were our walks around George Herbert's little church & rectory just outside Salisbury, & around Hardy's birthplace at Higher Bockhamton. But there were coarser pleasures—we ate & drank so much that we both gained almost ten pounds during the three weeks! Sometime we must tell you all about it. But why have I suddenly become such an Anglophile? I can't explain it, but I have—and am just dying to go back. I think it is partly because over there I have no responsibilities, & can simply relax & enjoy myself. Also, English society is extremely hedonistic & happy-go-lucky at the moment & makes Canada seem extremely puritanical & staid. There's a deep-seated malaise in this country at this time it seems to me—a complete lack of a sense either of destiny or of fun. Britain has lost—not altogether reluctantly—her sense of destiny, but is having a hell of a lot of fun just drifting. We're neither earnest nor gay—we're drifting in misery.

However, the response to your LP in L'Hibou makes clear that we could be stirred up to fun if we got the right stimuli. I think that should be your mission as a Canadian
poet—to stir us into delight. You’re about the only one who’s doing it—although Reaney & George Johnston do a bit of it too.

In this mood I have written the few bits of light verse which I enclose for your perusal. Will you let me have them back? Do you think I should send them to the *Canadian Forum*, or would they do me more harm than good? Be quite frank in telling us what you think. I know they’re not poetry, but are they light verse which would amuse people but not hurt the subjects thereof? As one of the subjects, you should be able to speak authoritatively on this point.

I do hope Aviva is soon and safely delivered of a son and heir. Tell her we’re thinking of her & wishing her well.

Love & kisses,
Des

Fugitive.

518.

July 27, 1964

Dear Desmond,

I’ve got a brand new son. He’s called Peter Herschel Layton, and he weighed in at 7 lbs 3½ ozs, ready to take on the whole world. By a consensus of opinion, he’s supposed to look like me, but since babies sometimes look jaundiced the first two or three days of their life, I tease Aviva by telling her she wasn’t too careful with her Japanese lover. Aviva is delighted with him, though she was praying all through her pregnancy and straining her womb for a girl. Now that Peter is here, she says she can’t imagine what life was like without him. I believe she will make an excellent mother. She has a wonderful way with children, from 6 year-olds on. Sometimes I’d drop-in on her at the school where she was teaching. It was evident at once those children loved her and hung onto every word she said to them. She has a marvellous knack for getting into a child’s mind and to work on it from the inside. And of course she’s a very warm person, full of tenderness and affection. I do believe Peter could not have chosen a more affectionate and tender mother.

I look forward to a great deal of happiness with Aviva and my son. When I had my other children, Max and Naomi, I was lost to the world—five teaching jobs to hold down, private lessons, a sick mother, debts, and turning out two volumes of poetry each year—to have much time or thought for them. I shall always regret this, yet looking back on that period I know for a certainty there was no other way of living possible for me at the time. Something drove me on, a feverish delirium that gave me no rest. I marvel I’m still alive when I recall some of the mad things I got myself into—or that I’m not in a sanatorium or a looney-bin.

Well, things are going to be different now. I intend to spend a lot of time with my family, and if I don’t write
another line of poetry for the next three or four years, it wouldn’t bother me in the least. At present I’m working on my Collected Poems, which will be published next autumn. I’ve over 425 poems—this after considerable pruning. By the time it’s ready for publication I shall probably have added another twenty-five poems. After that’s out I shall get to work on another collection of short stories, or perhaps—and preferably—an autobiography. The latter idea has been simmering in my mind ever since Malcolm Ross suggested it to me several years ago.

I don’t see how you can teach during the summer. You must really love teaching to be able to go on doing it through the hot summer months of July and August. Like myself you’re a glutton for work. But not many gluttons can boast of the many first-rate achievements you can. You’re a boon to this country.

I like your things, but I wonder whether they’d stand up to publication. They are somewhat recondite, I think—ingroupish. Your readers would need to know the facts about your "victims" in order to appreciate your fun & games. If they didn’t I believe a good deal of the satiric thrust would be lost on them.

Max arrived unexpectedly the day Peter was born—Friday am. He looks great. I leave for San Francisco in a couple of days. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

PS I agree with your observations on contemporary Britain wholeheartedly; something has happened there.

closure: Montreal Star birth announcement

1Peter’s name was later changed to David; see 544.2.


3Layton published the memoir Waiting for the Messiah (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart) in 1985.

Dear Desmond,

At last I’m where I ought to be.1 Where caves, huts, and mountain folds generate shy, bearded hirsute poets who’ve never published a single line of verse. At the foot of the mountain, watched over daily by a blessed untiring California sun, are to be found the best bourbon, steaks, vegetables and fruits that money can buy, and this we drag back to our lair in Betty’s gutsy Volkswagon. Betty and Naomi have a marvellous place, and both are flourishing. My daughter—I can only speak of her in superlatives. I’m very happy here. I’m a damned lucky man!
Love,
Irv

1Layton spent August 1964 in San Francisco visiting Betty and Naomi.

A Strange Turn¹
A moment ago, in my embrace,
Nude, she rode me like a Joan of Arc;
Then, seeing my fifty-year-old face
Where time’s acids had burned deep their mark,
My head of hair coloured grey and rust,
And my old eyes wide with genial lust:
She stiffened and held herself in check,
I felt her limbs slacken at my side
As sweetly she kissed my wrinkled neck;
Desire--unspent, had all but fled--
Leaving behind its wraith, mere sentiment,
That poised her astride me motionless.
Ah, if my flesh were but firm, not loose,
And I were young, how she’d ride and ride!

Irving Layton.

I wrote this in Montreal just before leaving for California, so don’t jump to the wrong conclusion. The lovely horsewoman was a passionate thing about half my age and finished her ride with the grandest flourish. And then it was my turn to do some riding, and I did, and I beat her to the post. But you’ve heard me say often enough that poets are liars to believe me when I say so (Paradox!). Cal is a great country for riding. All one needs is good breath!


"Beauty"¹
for Naomi
How does one tell
one’s fourteen-year-old daughter
that the beautiful
are the most vulnerable
and that a rage
tears at the souls
of humans
to corrupt innocence
and to smash butterflies
to see their wings
flutter in the sun
pulling weeds and flowers
from the soil:
and that all, all
go under the earth
to make room for more
weeds and flowers
--some more beautiful than others?
"In Rattlesnake Country"²
I'm not afraid
of that rattler:
What's its poor venom
compared to that of a human?

Irving Layton

¹Irving Layton, "Beauty," Love the Conqueror Worm np.


521. September 30, 1964

Dear Irving,

You are probably thinking all sorts of dire & dreadful things about me, and for once(?) I deserve them. If I don't answer letters at once, I don't answer them for months. In your letter of July 27, telling me the good news of the birth of your son, you said you were leaving for San Francisco next day, so I knew there was no point in writing at once. Then your letter of August 13 (from Carmel, Calif) arrived while we were on a week's holiday in PEI, & when I got back & found it I thought there was no use answering it since I had no idea how long you would be staying at that address. And so the weeks have sped by, & here it is almost October. I can only say I'm sorry, & assure you that my affection for you is still strong.

Since getting back from my brief holiday in late August I have been busy with a multitude of things, most of them administrative problems associated either with the School of Graduate Studies or with the Department of English. We are absolutely snowed under with both graduate & undergraduate students, & we have had all sorts of emergency meetings. I won't bore you with the details.

I've had very little time for writing, & have only managed an article (on Thomas Hardy's Wessex)¹ & one short story² in the last three months.

This coming fall & winter is going to be very busy. In addition to all the ordinary duties, I have a number of speaking engagements--at Mt A on Saturday October 17, at Toronto on November 13, and at Laval in January, to mention only the distant ones. And I must be in Ottawa from October 24 to 29 for the conference of Canadian universities. Which reminds me--my plane on October 24 (Sunday) lands at Montreal at 10 am, & I don't get a
connection for Ottawa until 12:45. Could we spend the 2½ hours together at the Montreal Airport having coffee & a good conversation?

I have a class now--so my love to you & Aviva & the young son--& please write!

As ever,
Des P


Pacey’s next published story was "A Fellow of Christhouse," Atlantic Advocate 57 (Sept 1966): 65-72.

523.

Dear Desmond,

By now you’ve probably received The Laughing Rooster. I sent it on before this letter because I didn’t know when I’d have a free moment to write you. This is going to be one helluva busy year for me, probably the busiest I’ve ever known. It seems the older I grow, the more burdens I take on. I’m teaching three evenings each week in addition to my regular daily stint at Ross. Did I write you that I’m giving several new courses this year, one in Medieval History, and the other, a survey course in Eng Lit for freshmen? I’m hugely enjoying both. Though being the conscientious bastard I am, I spend hours and hours preparing my lectures. Still, it’s fun. I’ve re-read "Samson Agonistes"1, "Absalom & Achitophel"2, the Metaphysicals, Antony and Cleopatra3, etc, etc. At the YMHA, I’m giving a course called "Literature and the Modern World". All the most attractive, elegantly attired, and sophisticated Jewesses in the suburbs of the city attend it. They make all my other students at Sir George Williams look like hopeless, dowdy provincials, which of course is what they are. Imagine yourself lecturing to more than fifty brainy, well-educated, well-travelled and beautifully got-up women, all in that interesting age when a woman knows how to put her intelligence and experience at the service of her sex. You could not ask for a greater responsiveness, a greater hunger for the right kind of knowledge. God bless them! I’ve learned more from attractive, flirtatious women than from any other source—it is the school all poets must attend, or they remain forever stunted, mawkish with that kind of deadly seriousness found in so much of contemporary verse. Our poets have forgotten how to laugh at the world and at themselves. They want wit, irony, seasoning. They need beautiful women to de-rusticate them, to get the straw out of their hair, and the raucousness out of their voices.
Do you know what an agony it is for me to read Tish? G—r-r. I grind my teeth as I drop it into the wastepaper basket.

I heard last night that Leonard Cohen had won the Prix Litteraire de Quebec--1st prize--for his novel The Favourite Game. It's the same one I got last year for Balls. The $4,000 will come in handy. He's currently working on another novel and another book of poems. His Flowers for Hitler will be out end of this month, along with Birney's book and my own Laughing Rooster. Jack McClelland is planning a junket for the three of us to go from one University to another, giving readings all of which will be followed by cameramen from the National Film Board who plan to make a film of our blusterings and ravings for distribution in and out of the country. Poetry has come of age! The poets are now running neck and neck with the Mounties in the nation's esteem and curiosity.

As soon as I've my Collected Poems off to the publisher, I'm turning back to short stories. I want to have another book of them out by 1966. And then, after that, a novel or two. If my investments continue to do as well as they have been doing lately I ought to be able to retire in a year or so and devote myself entirely to writing. If I didn't have the obligations I have now--to Betty, Max and Naomi--I'd be able to retire this afternoon. But I feel I owe them the best. I'm helping Bet to pay off the mortgage on the house she bought in Carmel, and Maxie insists he wants to keep his own apartment. He's at Sir George Williams this year, has already made himself noticed there--he's a feature writer on the university paper, The Georgian. He seems to be enjoying himself greatly. He's got good looks, a keen mind, and is unusually self—possessed for his eighteen years. He also has all of his father's fondness for women, and, I may add, his success with them. A chip off the old cock, you may say.

Aviva and Peter are leaving for Australia in a couple of weeks. They'll be gone until the winter is almost over. If you hear of strange orgies and fertility rites going on at 5731 Somerled Avenue, you have my permission to believe them. The Sufi mystics were right: A man is closest to God when he's in the arms of a woman.

Of course I'll try to meet you at the airport for a chat.

You're a great, good man, Desmond, and I love you.

Best love to Mary.

Hugs,

Irv

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3William Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra.
Leonard Cohen won the Prix Littéraire du Québec in 1964 for *Flowers for Hitler*.

See 483.3.

*Beautiful Losers*; see 549.12.


Ladies and Gentlemen...Leonard Cohen, dirs. Donald Brittain and Don Owen, National Film Board, 1965.

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524. October 20, 1964  

Dear Irving,  

Thank you for your most lively & interesting letter of October 11. I am very sorry not to have answered it earlier, but the day it arrived, last Tuesday, I suddenly found I had a temperature of 106° resulting from viral pneumonia. I have been in bed until today & still feel quite weak.  

I am still hoping, however, to come to Ottawa via Montreal this Sunday, arriving in Montreal at 10 am & leaving at 12:45, & I shall be delighted if it proves possible for you to meet me & for us to spend a couple of hours together.  

You certainly sound very busy this year. How on earth do you do it all?  

Glad to hear Max's making his mark at Sir George. My eldest daughter Mary Ann is doing the same here. She is a feature writer on the university paper¹ (doing mainly ficks, ballet & music reviews), won the prize for second year English, and has just been nominated as one of six candidates for Campus Queen. Talking of chips off the old cock...!  

Speaking of old cocks, I should tell you that the day before I came down with pneumonia I played soccer for the Faculty against the students, scored one of our three goals & gave the passes for the other two! But the pneumonia has pretty well decided me to quit--at 47 I still love to play soccer but I guess my system won't stand it.  

I have a class now so will save the rest for later. Oh those orgies! Can I come?  

Love,  

Des

¹The Brunswickian.
Dear Desmond,

Forgive the silence. Have been embroiled in numerous controversies the last few weeks, some in part arising from the reading tour you may have read about in *Time*\(^1\) and elsewhere. The fight goes on--against academicism, invalidism, and the cowardly philistines. Anyway, I'm still spying out new terrain, still pinching the "diseased nerves" of my countrymen. Yeats' prayer is mine too: I want to be no sage but a passionate, foolish old man\(^2\)...where were you that Sunday? I waited & waited. You're hopeless.

Love,
Irving

---


2. "That I may seem, though I die old
   A foolish, passionate man." lines 11-2.

W.B. Yeats, "A Prayer for Old Age," *Variorum* 553.

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Dear Irving,

A good job you broke the silence for I was resolved never to do so.

You may be the world's best poet, best lover, & best bull-shitter, but you are the worst meeter of trains & planes. I told you very clearly & exactly when I was arriving in Montreal, I wasted two hours waiting for you, & now you have the gall to tell me you waited two hours for me. Take your finger out & get your feet on the ground. Ever hear of calendars, dates, schedules etc etc?

So you've been touring with the bloody poets' circus, have you? And I suppose you've come back with your fat head swollen a few more sizes and your long penis emaciated from over-use. Did you ever read what Auden says about the false easy triumphs we can score with adolescents?\(^1\) Do you really think that the cause of poetry in this God-deserted country is served by the likes of your McClelland & Stewart travelling circus?

I may be green with envy, but you should be red with shame to prostitute your talent (*once* genuine, however limited) to such crass Madison Avenue capers. Can you imagine Donne or Yeats parading around with two other dancing bears to make a Roaming Holiday? And the poet was once called a Maker\(^2\)--of young girls, no?

Balls to you,
Desmond

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1. I have been unable to locate this quotation in the works of W.H. Auden.

2. See 169.3.
Dear Desmond,

Your foolish intemperate letter just in. I imagine I’ve touched your "raw nerve" also. Good!

I’ve checked your earlier letter. It says quite plainly--Sunday morning at nine o’clock--I was there at the airport at that time. From now on, the only place I’ll ever meet you will be at my house--no station, no airport, no public meeting-place of any kind.

Let me give it to you straight. McClelland, yes, Jack McClelland has done more for poetry than you or ten other professors like you have done. If it were up to your likes, poetry would still be as secret as masturbation. If poetry has come into its own in this country, it is because one publisher has more guts, drive, and imagination than all the profs of Eng Lit in this country put together. If you were to take the envious Dudek line that what we did was to demean the good name of poetry, then you can go fuck yourself. You’re so really worried about poetry, aren’t you? Well, fuck you, sit down and write some! This line of yours gives me the shits. I’ve been around too long fighting this particular battle to take that kind of guff from anyone.

Yrs,
Irv


Dear Irving,

Thanks for your vitriolic card.

I don’t know what can have happened about that meeting --I think you must have gone on the wrong Sunday! You’re altogether too busy concocting a legend of the absent-minded poet.

But I’m hellish busy and I write on urgent business. I’m just now sending in the complete material for the Canadian Number of The Literary Review--have been held up waiting for translations of French stuff--and as I go over my material I find your poems--"At the Iglesia de Sacromonte", "Silly Rhymes for A.", "My Queen, My Quean", and "Encounter"--have (I believe) all been published---& I am specifically debarred from using published material. Have you some unpublished poems I can consider? Quickly please!

Des

1These poems all appeared in Layton’s recently published The Laughing Rooster.
Dear Desmond,

But I told you, surely, that the poems you have selected were all going to appear in my book, *The Laughing Rooster*. If that’s not what you’re referring to, then to my knowledge "Silly Rhymes for Aviva", "My Queen, My Quean" and "Encounter" have never before appeared in print. "Iglesia de Sacramonte" was taken by Birney for some periodical, whose name just now escapes me, but I believe I told you about that.

I mailed you an inscribed copy of the LR, but since you’ve never acknowledged it I’m beginning to wonder whether it ever reached you. Did it?

Of course I owe an apology for the vitriolic postcard; at any rate, an explanation.

I hate cant words like "prostitution", etc, etc. And I hate to be judged purely by externals. If I feel that something is right I don’t give a hoot what it looks like to the world, expecting my friends to trust and respect me, no matter what the surface looks like to others.

In this instance, your remarks were cutting and most unfair. I’d had many misgivings about going on the tour, and had even used your image of "the dancing bears" in the letter I wrote Jack McC. He told me that without my participation the tour was off, and that my refusal was unjust both to him and to the other three poets. He also told me the thing was going to be done with dignity, etc, etc.

Now, as it turned out, the thing was a huge success. We gave readings at about six universities, and the voice of the poet was heard in the land as it had never been heard before. The audiences were both enthusiastic and discriminating, and there was no lowering of standards by any one of the four of us. The newspaper accounts, some of them, and the *Time* article were lying perversions written to get a laugh at our expense from the yahoos and philistines.

And get this also, Desmond. I didn’t need the extra publicity since I’ve already appeared this year at Carleton University, and had two readings scheduled at Toronto. Moreover, I already appeared in London, Ont, and about one week before the tour commenced, at McGill University. I was definitely running the risk of over-exposure in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, and London, and was therefore extremely reluctant to take part in the tour. Add to this, dear friend, that I’d have to take out a week from a heavy schedule of work, which I’d need to make up for when I got back, and that for all the readings I haven’t received a single cent, though Jack McClelland made vague noises about giving us each a measly hundred dollars or so. To put the financial aspect of the matter squarely before you, I ask and usually receive between a hundred and two hundred dollars for each reading I give.

My diffidence was overcome by a long-distance phone call from Jack who assured me over and over again that my
participation was a sine qua non⁴, and that the tour would ultimately benefit the cause of poetry in this country. On the latter score, for all your sneers and Dudek’s, he was absolutely right. Had you been present at anyone of those readings, and watched the audience’s faces and mingled with the people who came to hear us, you’d have no doubt on that score either. The Time article was a ridiculous lying perversion of the truth. There were receptions for us after each of the readings, and it gladdened our hearts to talk to the students who eagerly crowded around us. Believe me, Desmond, though I was dog-tired at the end of the week, the whole affair has left an afterglow in my memory that will warm my heart as long as I live. I’m sure that Cohen, Birney and Gottlieb would utter the same thoughts and sentiments.

I hope you can use the enclosed poems, or some of them. They’re poems I wrote this summer. My love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

enclosure: ts "Beauty" and "Strange Turn"

¹Prism; see 504.1.
²October 4, 1964. For Desmond, with admiration and much love, Irving Layton, Montreal, Quebec.
³Irving Layton, poetry reading, Carleton University, Ottawa 15 Sept. 1964.
⁴Latin: the absolutely indispensable.

530. December 11, 1964

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of Dec 9.

We seem to be at cross-purposes. I was just kidding about your trip. Why else would I write "I may be green from envy, but you should be red with shame?" Of course it’s good to get students excited about poetry. I’m sorry you took me seriously & felt you had first to reply in kind & then to justify yourself. Why should you justify yourself to me? You are your own triumphant justification! More power to you! Give it to them!

And I’m not mad about the poems having appeared in your book--I’m just sorry I couldn’t get my issue of The Literary Review out in time, before your book appeared, as had been my hope.

I did get your book, & when I came to Montreal hoping to meet you I brought the book with me, all marked with my comments, looking forward to an eager discussion of it with you. That will have to wait for a further opportunity.

Now as for these poems you’ve sent me--I think you know they’re not you at your very best. I’ll hold "Beauty" and "Strange Turn", but if by any chance(?) you write a masterpiece in the next few days, please rush it to me. I
like "Beauty", but "Strange Turn" is not really sincere or logical, is it?

In haste,
Des P

531.[pc] January 6, 1965
Dear Desmond,

Please don’t misconstrue my silence. I’m busy clearing the deck, literally and figuratively, in preparation for my leaving the country. I feel I need a long rest from controversies and arguments that I myself have begun. The last thing I want to see happen to me is to be taken captive by my own image. I want freedom and blessed independence—even from myself. Perhaps mostly from myself.

You’re wrong about the poems, but I don’t want to argue even about that! I don’t want to argue about anything. All I know is that I’m right and everyone else is wrong.

Love,
Irv

532. January 6, 1965
Dear Desmond,

Your letter in this morning. It seems ages since I last wrote you, though I did get a postcard off to you this very morning, asking you not to misconstrue my silence. I’ve been up to my ears in school-work, etc, besides getting together another collection of manuscripts, letters, etc, for the University of Saskatchewan. Mrs Lerew is handling the negotiations for me, and she thought the collection would fetch more if copies of the letters I wrote you and others were made available. I gave her the names of several persons I corresponded with regularly over the years, and she said she would write them to see if such copies might be obtained.

When I finished putting things in order, tears stood in my eyes when I surveyed the mass of correspondence, etc on the huge dining-room table. They were tears of self-pity, elation, pride, and yes, relief. If the evidence wasn’t before my own eyes I’d never believe that anyone holding down five teaching jobs, looking after a sick mother and an ailing wife, and turning out two books annually could have done it. And done it single-handedly, without any secretaries, or anyone else to help him. I know I’m bragging, but let me go on, and consider the outburst as a sort of delayed nervous breakdown. Man, I must have been insane in those years. My correspondence alone, apart from letters to yourself, runs into the thousands. There’s hardly a Canadian poet, young or old, that I haven’t been writing to over the years. I have about 75 letters from Purdy alone, and from Souster and Dudek about one hundred apiece. I have an extended correspondence with Robert Creeley, Cid Corman, Jonathan Williams, Earle Birney, Hugh
Kenner, Milton Wilson,—putting them all together, the Canadian poets and critics, and the American ones, I've corresponded with almost sixty persons. And this, does not include miscellaneous correspondence dealing with lecture tours, readings, advice to countless Canadians who have written to me for one reason or another, or the hundreds of letters relating to the publication of my books.

Wynne Francis is doing an article on me for Canadian Literature. When she saw all the stuff piled up nearly ceiling-high, her gasp almost sent the towering piles crashing to the floor. Right now she's going through my miscellaneous correspondence, having already gone through Dudek's hundred letters or so to me. All I can say now is that she seems to be dazed. Maybe I ought to get one or two witnesses to see the material before I hand it over to the Univ of Sask, so they can testify in later years that they saw it all with their own eyes. Anyhow, I shall certainly get a photographer to take a picture of it, so that when I'm relaxing in a villa on the Mediterranean, I can have it before me. Yes, sirree!

Relief, man, relief is what I feel. And gratitude that I've come through without my mental or physical health impaired. I know all this must sound like babbling to you, but when I think back over the past two decades, so full of tension and glory, the haste, the heat, the broken marriages, what astonishes me is the stubbornness and excellent health that saw me through it all. And now my intention is to leave all that behind me. Let someone else take up the quarrel with the foe. And here, I can't help remarking somewhat coyly that no one appears too eager to do so—in fact, it would seem that I've been hacking away all alone for more than two decades, and not a single individual willing to risk either skin or reputation to draw the fire away from me for even a moment. Brave countrymen, I applaud you!

No, my dear Desmond, I wasn't trying to justify myself to you when I explained the particulars behind the poetry tour sponsored by McClelland & Stewart. I thought you meant your strictures in earnest and since you're a friend I wanted you not to misjudge me. It seemed to me that you had. It was in fairness to yourself as much as to me that I wanted you to be in possession of all the facts. Okay?

I like your suggestion about bringing out a volume of our selected correspondence. Of course we both have letters not intended for the public eye, and I have no compunction about eliminating them. Do you want to write to Jack McClelland concerning this? You can tell him I'm in favour of the project. There's only one hitch. I don't know whether I have all your letters going back to 1957. I probably put those letters in a manila bag, just as I did with your later ones, but you know I've moved two or three times since I first received your letters in Cote St Luc. I'll make another search for them, but I'm not too optimistic.
This summer I’m leaving for Greece with my friend Bill Goodwin. Of course I shall be visiting Leonard in Hydra, probably stay there for a couple of weeks. Then we’ll motor to Istanbul, Bucharest, Vienna, ending up in Spain and Lisbon from where we’ll fly back to Montreal. I’m taking a sabbatical leave from all my teaching jobs this Fall, so that I can make a reading tour of American & Canadian universities after my Collected is published. Then I’m off to Australia, and if the climate is as wonderful as Aviva keeps telling me it is, I shall stay for a couple of years. Otherwise, I intend to make my home in Greece.

You seem to be damned productive these days. That’s wonderful. I look forward to seeing your review. By all means we must see each other if you’re going to be in Montreal. But, please, not in a railway station, or any other bedevilled place. Hugs to Mary.

Love,
Irving

1Fugitive.

2Layton sold a collection of his letters, manuscripts and papers to the University of Saskatchewan in 1965 for $3600.

3Laurie Lerew, a literary agent for Laurie Hill Ltd., 750 Sherbrooke strett, Montreal.


5"Take up our quarrel with the foe:" (line 10), John McCrae, "In Flanders Fields," In Flanders Fields and Other Poems (Toronto: Briggs, 1919) 3.

6Layton was guessing at the date of the start of their correspondence; see 533.

7See 547.1.


533. January 14, 1965
Dear Desmond,

It’s not what you call my "amazing productivity" I want to take a rest from, but from being a one-man poetry corporation. It’s the correspondence, the handing out of advice, the sending out of books, the replying to enquiries, the readings, etc etc—all this I must leave behind now. If I’m to do the big things I feel I have it in me to do—both in poetry and fiction—I shall need solitude, peace of mind. If I can find it here in Canada, I’ll stay here. Otherwise I’ll do a Leonard Cohen disappearing act.

The main thing is to sink from the public view for a couple of years, wrap myself in the black shawl of
anonymity—put an end to, for me now, the now stultifying dialogue I’ve been carrying on for nearly two decades with my countrymen. No more public pronouncements, readings, etc, etc. I know what my further development needs and I intend to get it.

Your correspondence with me over the years, your friendship and concern help greatly to keep me sane. I say this in simple gratitude.

I’ll look hard and long to find your earlier letters. What I have of yours begin in 1954, and continues until last week. I have about 200 letters of yours. If you wish I’ll send them to you and you can make your own selection.

I hope you’re planning to stay with me on your next trip West. Hugs to Mary.

Love to both,

Irving

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1See 275 and 286, in which Layton refers to leaving Canada as "doing a Bliss Carman."
(Cohen had lived primarily on Hydra, Greece, since 1960, returning to Montreal to renew his "neurotic affiliations."

2There are 210 Pacey letters to this point in the correspondence.

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January 18, 1965

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of January 14.

I have now made a quite careful check of your letters to me. Hitherto I have been talking loosely from memory, and I find that my memory is very bad. The first letter I have from you is dated June 1955, and speaks of the pleasure it gave you to meet me & Fred C in Montreal. This obviously was the real start of our correspondence, though there may have been one or two earlier letters of a semi-official type (if so, they’re lost). The total number of letters I have from you is somewhat over 300, instead of the nearly 1000 that I had been wildly guessing. This does not include the many poems, clippings, letters from other people etc you have also sent me from time to time.

Why don’t you now write to Jack McClelland and tell him that we have roughly 500 letters in the correspondence 1955-65, and that we would be willing to edit a selection of them if he is interested? We could work out the mechanics of editing later—but if you got an affirmative answer from Jack before mid-February, it is possible that I could bring the letters with me to Montreal & that we could set aside Sunday Feb 21 to [do] a preliminary sorting job together.

Anyway, I definitely hope to get to Montreal from Ottawa on Saturday Feb 20 & stay over until Sunday night. Can you put me up or shall I reserve a hotel room? And find out where the best girly show is & we’ll go that Saturday night! I look forward to seeing you with great pleasure.

I’ve had another letter from Mrs Lerew, & I enclose my reply. I feel we should stall her off until we decide
about publication. No doubt if we did publish we'd be accused of exhibitionism etc etc, but I think we can brush that off as envy.

You may be annoyed by what I say to Mrs. Lerew about prices. I hope you'll say so if you are, but at the moment I'm quite concerned about guaranteeing Mary's security in case I should pop off suddenly, & it seems to me that in fairness to her I should get as much as I can for everything I have. Unlike you, I have accumulated virtually no capital, & I must start.

I think you know how much your friendship has meant to me. It's been one of the bright threads in the fabric of the last decade. You have often bucked me up when I felt depressed, & I've always been flattered that you considered me worth writing to. Let's hope our friendship will continue for at least another decade!

Hugs,
Des Pacey

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There are 320 Layton letters to this point in the correspondence.

3Laurie Lerew, letter to Desmond Pacey, 12 Jan. 1965, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

5Desmond Pacey, letter to Laurie Lerew, 18 January 1965, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

January 28 [1965]

Irving,

Here, for your comments, is my review.

Have you seen The Literary History of Canada, just published at $18 by U of T Press? It's a big, handsome book of almost 1000 pages, very uneven, but in its way a landmark.

I have been puzzled by your failure to reply to my last letter. Do you not want me to stop over in Montreal Feb 20-21?

Must get ready for a long seminar on Conrad this afternoon, so I'll cut this short.

As ever,
Des

536.

Montreal, Quebec
February 1, 1965

Dear Desmond,

Forgive my silence. I've so many wheels whirring about in my head just now, that if anyone split it open they would spin in the weak winter sunlight all the way from here to Fredericton.
Of course I want you to stop over here Feb 20-21. I’m marking the date down on the calendar, and I’m making the mark in the form of a Cross to scare away any mischievous devils who might wish to keep us apart as they have succeeded in doing on other occasions. For re-inforcement I’m also pencilling in a Star of David.

You ask me whether I’ve seen The Literary History of Canada. I haven’t. Is that the one you wrote that long, excellent survey piece for that I slashed away at with my piratical sword? I guess it is. Where can I purchase a copy? Sight unseen, I’m eager to buy one, because of your article in it. Also, I suppose one should buy one’s literary mausoleum while he’s still alive and able to enjoy a little trot in it.

Last week I wrote Jack McClelland about our book, but I haven’t heard from him yet. Maybe there’ll be a letter from him in this morning’s mail. Mrs Lerew says you could sell the letters to her, and we could still publish the book, for the university that purchased the collection wd be more than happy to have us use it for that purpose. You have my blessing, whatever you decide. She’s rounding up, or trying to, the letters I wrote to Souster, Creeley, and Cid Corman. They’d be a fine batch, too, though not as extensive or as revealing as those I wrote to you. With no one else did I have so prolonged and uninterrupted a correspondence as with yourself, to no one did I write so intimately. Since there was never any thought in my mind of these letters being published, or of them being seen by anyone but you, I wrote whatever came into my mind, or my heart and the moment dictated. They might be good, or they might be very horrible. I don’t know, I don’t remember. And I don’t really care. I’ve closed up the old shop, and I’m searching for new premises. The new shop, I promise you, will be quite, quite different.

Aviva writes happily about Sydney. Wants me to come. My alternative plan is for us to meet on Leonard’s isle, Ydra, where I shall be spending part of my summer. Or she might be back home before the month is out. We’ll see. I’m enclosing a clipping about Max.¹ Since neither I nor Betty can keep a tune in our heads, I don’t know where he gets his talent. Some stray milkman, do you suppose?

Hugs,
Irving

¹"Original Play with Music," Georgian (Sir George Williams University student newspaper), 27 Jan. 1965: 3.

[s.c.](February 5, 1965pm): Omer Anderson, "Soviet Prison Camp Film Cleared for West Germany"
537. February 5, 1965
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of Feb 1. I had just about decided you must be living in sin with some luscious blonde and didn’t want to share her with me!

All being well, I shall arrive in Montreal for the Canada Council sessions in Ottawa on Saturday afternoon, Feb 20. I’ll phone you from the airport if planes are flying that day, or from the station if they aren’t.

Let me know when you hear from Jack McClelland about the letters.

You don’t mention my review of Cohen, Souster etc. Didn’t you get it?

The Lit Hist of C is to be officially published on Feb 13, I believe. There are sure to be lots of copies on sale in Montreal. I’d like to give you one, but I only got one free copy myself, & it costs $18!! I’m sending you the proofs of a little squib I’ve just had published in The Atlantic Advocate.¹ How do you like it?

It will be good to see you again & have a real heart-to-heart talk.

Love,
Des


538. [February, 1965]
Dear Desmond:

I don’t think the issue is quite so simple as apparently you’ve reduced their writing to: introversion vs. extroversion; simplicity vs obscurity. The real quality in each of the poets doesn’t come through; I’d like to see you put your finger on each man’s work and characterize it for us.

You’re on the outside of the work, walking all around it, pointing out the obvious broken shutters and pigeonshit, but the inner essence has escaped you. And why don’t you quote?

Hugs,
Irving

[PS] Jack McClelland writes me to say he ain’t interested in our book!

enclosure: Pacey review "Three Books of Canadian Verse" with Layton marginalia:
These three books make a most interesting and varied trio. Mr. Cohen, whose two previous books of verse were chiefly distinguished by their lyrical facility, sensuous richness and deft wit, has decided to "set his chisel to the hardest stone," and write about the horrors of the external world in our time: "the mushroom cloud," "wars planned with blood," "men in chains," Hitler, Goebbels, Goering, the concentration camps, Eichmann, syphilis, cancer, pus and blood. Mr. Mandel, on the other hand, although his world too is terror, can find monsters enough within his own soul, "beasts inside him." When he sees a George Wallace sculpture of a hanging man, it is not of Hitler's victims that he thinks but of himself:

[quotes Mandel] Mr. Souster is much more various. He can be angry with the cruelty, greed, and stupidity of society, as is Mr. Cohen, or aware of the sickness in his own soul, as is Mr. Mandel, but more frequently it is compassion for the victims that he expresses. He is, I think, more of a true extrovert than either Cohen or Mandel. There is something forced about Cohen's extroversion: it does not seem natural to him. Mandel is an introvert and accepts the fact.

Souster goes about the world with his eyes and ears open and reports what he sees.

...Mr. Souster has set his chisel to the softest stone. He has dared to do what Principal Frye described as making poetry out of his own little daily feelings and observations.
Now from what I know of Mr. Souster—and I cannot pretend to know him intimately—it seems to me that his natural self is if anything even more inclined to introspection than Mr. Mandel’s. Chiselling the softest stone, for Souster, would be uttering polite little cries about his own loneliness, insecurity and fear. Instead, he has forced himself to objectify his own emotions, has trained himself to observe and sympathize with not himself but the beggars, newspaper vendors, dishwashers, junkmen, prostitutes and lovers of Queen Street and Yonge. In the process, Souster has done what the artist should do: made us hear, made us feel, made us, above all, see. He has made us more aware of the world in which we live.

In contrast, Mr. Cohen’s parade of external horrors seems artificial and contrived. Let us give Mr. Cohen credit for trying to set his chisel to the hardest stone.
"...All I ask is that you put it in the hands of my generation and it will be recognized." I hope Mr. Cohen didn’t intend that note to be published, for it back any reviewer into a nasty corner. If the reviewer doesn’t praise Hitler, he is obviously a softie, who prefers the sensuousness of Spice-Box, or he is a traditionalist who rejects the new and experimental, or he is an old man who has lost touch with the present generation. Well, cornered or not, I’ll give my honest opinion of Flowers for Hitler. I admire Mr. Cohen’s determination not to indulge himself by repeating his earlier successes, but I do not think he has yet mastered his new style. With a few exceptions, the best things in this book are those which do what Mr. Cohen has done well before—especially love songs such as "For Marianne," "Waiting for Marianne," and "The Rest Is Dross," and fantasies such as "The Bus." If he has set his chisel to the hardest stone, he has too often been content to chip at it. One sign of this is the multiplicity of the poems. There are ninety-five poems in this book, and they must be the product of at most two years. Many of them are mere sketches for poems, and should not have been published at all. A few of them are excellent—"What I’m Doing Here," "On Hearing a Name Long Unspoken," "Montreal, 1964," in addition to the ones already mentioned—but too many of them are routine gestures towards a fashionable ‘engagement’.

Since he quite obviously didn’t, why waste time and place quoting and commenting on it? In any event, that’s not the reviewer’s concern—I mean, the poet’s intentions. Why make such a show of bravery, when after all, no reader expects otherwise from you? Has it occurred to you at any given time, for any given reason, not to give an honest opinion? Someone has borrowed my copy of Flowers, so I can’t name the poems but I think you are badly mistaken here. There are several poems in which Cohen has gone beyond his earlier verse, into new realms of feeling and observation, which indicate the larger, more public road he will travel from now on. I think you’ve missed this. There’s an excellent long poem about the rich. Why don’t you quote from LC? Why don’t you try to isolate the "new" quality in his verse. The audacious metaphors and images—above all, the different sensibility?
Mr. Mandel is a far more exigent poet. His book contains thirty-eight poems, and they are the product of some four years of work. One feels that the individual poems have been carefully reworked, that the chisel has been plied and re-plied in order to reveal the essential shape of experience. Unfortunately, there is an element of self-indulgence in Mandel's work too: having interested himself in poetry which is obscure and allusive and gnomic, he has not sought clarity in his own work. Only occasionally, as in "Thief Hanging in Baptist Hells" from which I have already quoted, or in "Charles Isaac Mandel" or in "Yonge Street Minstrel," does Mandel cease his riddling. This is a pity, for it is obvious that Mandel feels deeply, that he is really more responsive to the human condition of our time than Mr. Cohen, and that if he wished he could speak to us with a direct and passionate sincerity. Whether because of the Canadian fashion of which I spoke earlier, or because of his long academic absorption in "difficult" poets, he too often hides behind a prickly hedge of obscurity. His poetry, therefore, will frighten off all but a tiny minority of literary exegetes, who will read it not so much to be stirred by its emotions as to flatter their own intelligence.

What does that mean? urgent? pressing? or requiring more? all possible meanings for the word. Aren't you mixing your metaphor slightly--this isn't the Yeatsian but the commonplace use of the chisel image.

I think EM does seek for clarity; if he's obscure it is for other reasons, some of which may well be the reader's fault. See The Chequer'd Shade, an excellent book on obscurity in modern poetry. Are you certain of this? Is the feeling measurable?

They may also read it because it has the flavor of genuine poetry. It's bad enough to abuse the poet without also abusing his few devoted readers.
540. February 16, 1965

Dear Giving,

Thanks for your scribbled notes on my Aix-en-Provence article. You seem to be in a very critical mood. I scribbled that article in one morning during the Christmas holidays--& got $200 for it! So why expect perfection? It's a light squib, & that's all.

Don't be nasty to me when I come to Montreal this weekend. I am very tired, faced with great decisions, & I want you to amuse me, comfort me, support me, flatter me even!

Now, if planes are flying, I shall arrive from Ottawa at the Montreal International Airport on Flight 428 at 6:20 pm this Saturday, Feb. 20, & leave Sunday evening. If you feel like meeting my plane Sunday evening, fine--but in view of our frustrated attempts to meet perhaps I'd just better come out to your place in a taxi. If there is any change in my plans, I'll wire or phone you from Ottawa.

What shall we do? We should go to a good foreign movie Saturday evening (if there is one) & then to a strip-tease joint--& Sunday you can read me your poems & we'll talk over all our problems. OK?

If by any chance you've forgotten about my visit & made other conflicting plans, please phone me at home before Thursday evening or in the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa on Friday or Saturday morning.

Hugs,
Des

541. March 8, 1965

Dear Irving,

Sorry not to have written before this to thank you for your warm hospitality during my stopover in Montreal two weeks ago. Things have been very hectic here since I returned--among other things, we have been celebrating our annual Founder's Day, and I am chairman of the committee in charge.

It was very kind of you to meet me at the airport & to arrange for me to attend that Sir GW party. I greatly enjoyed meeting all the people there, and was particularly delighted to be able to witness your amatory art in practice. You are a smooth seducer--the only pity was that the women concerned seemed scarcely worthy of your talents. My standards are high, so high in fact that I've yet to see a woman other than my wife that I'd want to bother seducing.

The Canada number of The Literary Review is scheduled for summer publication. The American editors profess to be very pleased with the selections & the editor's introduction.1

Have you seen Michael Parr's new book of poems, The Green Fig Tree?2 It is being published by Macmillan in New York & London as well as in Toronto, and I think it marks the advent of a Canadian poet of real stature.
Reviews are coming in for *The Literary History of Canada*. You can't place much faith in reviews, however. Two arrived together the other day. The first I read was from the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, & said, in effect that though the book as a whole was useful but rather dull, there were some brilliant chapters in it, especially those by Desmond Pacey. I glowed with pride! The other review was from the *Toronto Varsity*, & said that Pacey proved his utter incompetence to deal effectively with Canadian lit & that it was a pity his chapters had not been written by Hugo Macpherson! I looked to see whose name was attached to this obviously insensitive review--& found that it was one George Parker, a Mt A grad whom we rejected here as a PhD candidate three years ago!

I promised to send you the first draft of my story "A Fellow of Christhouse", and I enclose it. I know myself that it just won't do in its present form--too many clichés, too little sense of immediacy, too little subtlety in characterization. Before I rewrite it, however, I should welcome any suggestions you may have.

When does Aviva arrive? I hope soon, as I am sure the reunion will be good for you both.

As ever,
Des

enclosure: ms "A Fellow of Christhouse"

1Desmond Pacey, "The Canadian Imagination," *The Literary Review* 437-44 (see 503.2).

2Michael Parr (b. 1927), English poet who emigrated to Canada after World War II, author of *The Green Fig Tree*.


6See 522.2.

March 21, 1965
Dear Desmond,

A great pleasure to have you with me. The party for Fiedler and *Woman of the Sands*! were strokes of luck. I'm glad you enjoyed both, and I'm glad too we had lots of time to talk of personal, non-literary matters. Of course I put on that show for your benefit at the party and it would have been a much better one if the stimulus had been greater. At my best, I'm irresistible! That night I was shooting way below par. Still, I was delighted to see that on the strength of my erotic eloquence you were able to squeeze the bubbly of the rather pretty woman who was sitting beside you
on the sofa. She was so mesmerized by my wit and eloquence, she scarcely felt your fingers on her well-shaped tit.

All married men are dishonest! With themselves, I mean.

If I hadn’t resolved to give myself a year’s rest from writing I’d write a poem about you and that non-academic tit. As it is, your marital repressions are safe from my Dionysian laughter.

Well, the job at Saint Jean’s Military College has come through, and I’m now an Assistant Professor. And you know what? The very next day, Neil Compton, the Head of the English Dept at Sir George Williams, phoned to tell me the Board of Governors had approved a resolution making me Poet-In-Residence at an annual salary of six thousand. It was too late, I’d already accepted the other offer. Well, my new job frees me at long last from a drudgery (well, not exactly that, but you know what I mean—the long hours of teaching, paperwork, etc etc) I’ve buckled under for nearly two decades. Now I want to get down to the great poems and stories I feel I have it in me to write. No more controversies, letter-writing. I want an anonymity from which I can pounce on a startled world five or ten years from now. I shall give the world a book of lyrics such as it has never seen. I shall be the true successor to Heine. Only greater.

Thanks for letting me read your story. I can’t add much to your own criticisms of it, since you see its weaknesses better than I do. As it now stands, it’s not so much a story as an anecdote one might put into a letter. There’s no dramatic tension in it whatever. I do think you’ve got the kernel of something in it, if you can make more of the opposition between you and old fartcake.

How do you feel about the Vietnamese business? I’m with LBJ all the way, though once again my liberal and radical friends are marching their stupid legs off. Thank God for American idealism—and hardheadedness.

Hugs,
Irving


2Layton was poet-in-residence at Sir George Williams University 1965-7.

3The Vietnam War (1957-75) had been mainly a struggle between the South Vietnamese army and Communist-trained South Vietnamese rebels known as the Vietcong until March 6, 1965, when President Lyndon B. Johnson sent the first US ground troops to Da Nang, intensifying the conflict and drawing the North Vietnamese into active conflict.
543. March 25, 1965

Dear Giving,

Thanks for your characteristically arrogant letter of March 21. Poor Heine! He must be turning in his grave. Someone—Dudek?—sent me a booklet of verse entitled Laytonic Love.¹ Rather weak stuff. Parodies, to be publishable, should be at least clever. These were dull & ignorant. You have nothing to fear from that corner. You’ve reached a most uncomfortable stage now, though—one which I’ve reached twice in my career. There’s the stage when you are the neophyte, the underdog, and everyone either ignores you (infuriating!) or steps on you; then you begin to climb up, & though it’s difficult it’s fun, because there are hand-holds here & there, encouraging remarks, & so on; then all of a sudden one has arrived at the top, & it’s wonderful—flattery, congratulations, awards, honours etc etc; & then people suddenly (or gradually, rather) realize that you’re sitting up there & that you’re only human & that you have left your very human buttocks & balls exposed—& so they proceed to shoot at you, & though you can ignore some of the hits there’s the odd one that catches you on the tender right testicle & really zings. Well, Mr Robinson missed both testicles, but someone’s going to hit me on both of them this day or that—so be prepared.

As I say, I’ve been through this process at least twice—once at Brandon College², & now I’m in the last phase here, with everybody ganging up & saying "Who’s Pacey think he is, anyway? Why should he be head of English, dean of Grad Studies, secretary of faculty, president’s pet, etc etc?"

I think you’re imagining that stuff about my straying fingers. You know very well that I am a chaste & faithful spouse, and that I sin not, even in the mind. I do not even look upon another woman to lust after her. You are the dirty old lecher with a lust on every wind. I didn’t even notice that Martha had tits!

Congrats on the College Militaire Royale job. Now you’re really a member of the Establishment—indeed of two Establishments, the academic & the military. Keep your hands off the privates’ privates, my boy, or you’ll be a public disgrace!

As usual, our political views are dramatically opposed. I think the Americans are mad to be in Vietnam. Your position is easy & predictable—with you, might is always & only right.

You don’t say anything about Aviva. No news of her impending arrival from Australia?

Just yesterday I got word from the Canada Council that my application for $5,000 to bring a resident writer here in 1965-6 had been granted. You eliminated yourself from
consideration. What would you think of Norman Levine? I want a young chap who hasn’t really broken through yet but who almost certainly will, & who desperately needs money. Norman seems to me to fill the bill nicely, if he’ll come. Of course I have to work through a committee on this, but if you have any bright ideas I’ll put them forward.

Love,

Des

1I have been unable to locate a copy of this parody.

2Pacey was Professor of English at Brandon College, University of Manitoba, 1940-44.

3Norman Levine served as UNB’s first writer-in-residence, 1965-6.

Dear Desmond,

Ah, not arrogance, humility, man, made me compare myself to Heine. Shows to go how high, how skyscraperish my standards are, which way the Aeolian wind is blowing. Given freedom from the kind of wacky pressure I’ve had to accomodate in the past, I hope I shall write those crystal clear lyrics I have in mind. No guck, this time, no muck, only the pure distilled blood of enduring poetry. The voice kept down to a whisper the whole world shall hear. It looks as if I shall be given the chance. Now it’s up to myself.

Memo to a D.O.G.S.: Listen attentively to every poet who tells you his dreams!

I must have forgotten to tell you Aviva and I are meeting at Hydra this summer. Leonard Cohen has found a cottage for us, and Aviva is leaving Sydney sometime this month to take possession and get it in shape for our frantic reunion. I’ll be sailing from New York in June. Of course she’ll be coming back with me. She’s sent me some photos of David-Peter. He looks great! My other son is with Betty, writing a novel and composing songs for his guitar. Bet says he’s half-way through with his novel, and working hard at it. I’ve promised to support him in Spain or Greece if I like the first draft of the novel, so that he can lick it into shape free from all money cares. Naomi is studying modern dancing and classical guitar. I guess she has her old man’s love of antinomies. Betty says she’s painting at the top of her heart and she has some of her things on exhibition in the local art gallery. The patriarch in me, you might say, is damned well pleased with all this.

I think Levine is an excellent choice. It’s about time he was repatriated. Also, I think he’d have a good deal to offer the students, seeing he can provide them with an out-of-the-country viewpoint. Sir George Williams wants me to be their permanent poet-in-residence. Though the salary is half of what Saint Jean’s offered, I’m greatly tempted to back out of the one and into the other.
Listen, Bozo, I support the Americans not because I believe might is right (what a silly statement to make—really there are times when you surpass yourself!) but because I think it's important to withstand Communist pressure in that part of the world. I don't envy the Americans. They've gotten themselves entangled in a sorry mess thousands of miles away from home, and they haven't developed either the new methods or cadres needed to fight the different kind of war the Communists are compelling them to wage. When I say I go all the way with L.B.J, I don't want you to infer that I approve everything the Americans are doing in Vietnam. I have plenty of reservations about the wisdom of their strategy and some of their tactics. What I do mean is that I have confidence in Johnson's reasonableness, and yes, political idealism; and that I believe he will act in accordance with America's best traditions as well as her interests. Your simple directive to the embattled Americans to pull out of Vietnam strikes me as being much too naïve, the consequence of that kind of moralistic impatience that can undo all of us, and which I'm glad to see Harold Wilson and our own leaders have the good sense to dismiss. The issues are really too complex for that. The Americans are deeply committed in that region, and we all along with them. After South Vietnam goes, who next? Cambodia? Thailand? Burma? And what about the pressure then on Japan and Australia?

Again, please don't misunderstand me—I'm not arguing for a merely military policy for the containment of Asiatic communism. That would surely fail. My outlook—see the letters I wrote you at the time of the Suez crisis—is Periclean. I believe Europe and America must defend their type of civilization and extend it by offering the underdeveloped countries in Asia the economic, social and political advantages of that civilization. To retreat in the face of Communist pressure is both cowardly and dangerous. The world today—I mean the free world—can't afford either your political naïveté or your impatience with difficult problems. While people like yourself were throwing out their "how-good-it-makes-me-feel-to-say-it" platitudes, the Americans stopped the enemies of freedom dead in their tracks in Greece, Berlin, Korea, Cuba and will, I hope, do it again in Vietnam.

Love,
Irving

enclosure:Murrey Marder, "US—Russian Talks 'Cordial'"
Montreal Star 27 Mar. 1965 (ms: For God's sake, Desmond, do read some books on Soviet and Chinese Communism. Your ignorance and naïveté are positively dangerous! Read Jules Monnerot's Sociology and Psychology of Communism.)
"A Vital Step Toward Peace" (editorial) New York Times

1In Greek mythology Aeolus was appointed keeper of the winds by Zeus and later considered to be the wind god; Layton here identifies him with poetic inspiration.
2 See 518.


4 Beginning in November, 1964 the American strategy in Vietnam had turned to bombing of the so-called "Ho Chi Minh trail," military sabotage missions against North Vietnam by the South Vietnamese forces with US assistance, and attacks on the North Vietnamese coast by US warships; the US air offensive against North Vietnam was intensified on March 2, 1965.

5 Harold Wilson (1916-82), Labour leader and British Prime Minister (1964-66; 66-70, 74, and 74-76), defended in the House of Parliament on March 9 the government's policy of promising British support for the US policy of "measured response" (ie bombing raids) to Viet Cong attacks. The Canadian delegate to the ICC submitted a report on February 13 defending the raids as a reprisal against North Vietnamese "aggression."

6 Layton is here echoing the "domino theory"; President Harry Truman had declared that the United States must help any nation threatened by communists--his policy was adopted by succeeding Presidents--Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson--who like him feared that if one Southeast Asian nation fell to the communists, the others would also fall one after another, "like a row of dominoes."

7 See 280.8.


545. April 5, 1965

Dear Irving,

I'm fearfully busy at this time of the year as all the MA & PhD theses are pouring in & I have to appoint reading committees, arrange oral examinations, check student's records etc etc. On top of all that I'm busy marking my own essays, giving my end of term lectures, & serving on a variety of committees. And on top of all that again, I'm trying to write a critical essay on the poetry of Louis Macneice to read at the Royal Society meetings in Vancouver in June.1 I've never been quite so hard-pressed as I am right at this moment so I hope you'll forgive me if I don't write you the kind of letter you deserve.

But I do want to thank you for your letter of April 2, & for your phone call of last night. You quite overemphasize my virtues, but it does one good to be praised once in a while, & certainly my friendship with you has been one of the best parts of life over the last ten years. Because our interests overlapped but did not compete it was possible for us to have a relationship at once close and detached, if you see what I mean. I'm happy that my letters helped you over some rough spots in your personal life, and I know that your letters to me often cheered me up when I was badly in need of cheer.

Do I understand that you are sending my letters out to the U of Saskatchewan? I have no great objection to that, as I understand they can't make any use of them without my consent. There is, however one letter which I know I wrote
you in which I was not honest, & I should like that letter to be cut out or burned before it is seen by anyone else.² It was a letter I wrote to you from England, probably in November of 1962. I had recently visited the little village in Notts where I spent some of my boyhood, & met again for the first time in over thirty years a girl with whom I had a childish romance. In a silly attempt to suggest that I had at some time been a Don Juan I spoke of having had a sexual relationship with her in the distant past. This was silly boasting, as you probably guessed if you thought about the matter at all. For I left Nottinghamshire in 1931, when I was barely fourteen, & that girl was three years my junior. Our relationship had no sexual component whatever, though she still has a crush on me & since that meeting has been pursuing me with letters which have become quite embarrassing in their ardour.

Tuesday

Well, at that point it was time to go for a lecture. Delighted to hear you & Aviva are foregathering in Hydra this summer. The other members of your patriarchy seem to be distinguishing themselves in various ways. Our Philip has just been awarded a $3000 NRC Scholarship for his final PhD year at Toronto.³ I have cabled Levine & had his reply--he will be our writer-in-residence next year.

My article on George Herbert is just out in The Atlantic Advocate⁴, & I have written another travel sketch called "A Night North of Rome."⁵ I enjoy doing the travel sketches when I am too tired to do anything else.

Love,
Des P

²#453: November 20, 1962.
³Philip Pacey received his PhD in Physical Chemistry from the University of Toronto in 1967.
⁴Desmond Pacey, "Easter Homage to George Herbert," Atlantic Advocate Apr. 1965: 40-44.
sentimentalities, and adopt a forceful, imaginative policy with regard to the underdeveloped regions. It would have been so easy for the Americans to have pulled out, as you and your bleeding-heart friends recommended instead of standing firm despite abuse, insult, and misunderstanding. Hurrah for Harold Wilson, too---the first socialist I've been able to respect in a long, long time.

Irving

1 In a broadcast speech on April 7, President Johnson said that the US government was prepared to enter into "unconditional discussions," with North Vietnam but that the US would not withdraw from South Vietnam and would insist that South Vietnam remain independent. He also promised to inaugurate a $1 billion aid program for Southeast Asia, and invited the UN and other industrialized countries to co-operate.

2 On April 8, Harold Wilson released a statement welcoming Johnson's "statesmanlike and imaginative" approach as offering "a framework within which it would be possible to resolve the present conflict and extend to the people of Vietnam the hope of progress towards peace and economic and social betterment."


June 21, 1965

Dear Irving,

I am not sure whether this will catch you before you leave for Greece---but I'll try it anyway.

I have recently returned from Vancouver where I attended the Conference of Learned Societies at UBC & read a paper to the Royal Society on the poetry of Louis MacNeice. While there I had a talk with Dorothy Livesay, who wants me to try to locate Samuel Gesser2. Apparently he was to make a Folkways recording of West Coast poetry3, & she wonders what has become of the project. Do you have his address, or that of whoever is currently in charge of Folkways?

How goes everything? I hope you have a very good summer.

As ever,
Des Pacey

1 Layton and Aviva spent late June and July and August in Hydra with Leonard Cohen.

2 Samuel Gesser, Canadian representative for Folkways Records of New York.

3 In the Canadian number of Pan (1958), an advertisement appears for the forthcoming Folkways release Six British Columbia Poets (FL 9807) but the record was never issued.
October 7, 1965

Dear Irving,

I believe you owe me one or more letters, but since you have been kind enough to send me a copy of your Collected Poems I’ll break down & write to you again. The book is most impressive--both in its quantity & quality. You have every reason to be proud of it. Thanks!

We have Norman Levine here as Resident Writer & he & I have become close friends. He is a very honest & essentially humble man, & he has great sensitivity. He has made an excellent impression on students & faculty, in spite of adverse publicity which preceded his arrival.¹

Did you have a good summer? Is Aviva with you? Are you enjoying your role as Resident Poet? Are you still sexually potent? Don’t you love me any more? Why haven’t you written? What are you writing? What’s Max up to? Did you get The Literary Review? (Canada number) & did you like it? Will you come here for a weekend soon or would you like me to come to Montreal? How’s Leonard Cohen? Are you getting much? Is it still unwrinkled? Do you dream of steamrollers? Are you immersed in the destructive element? Did you see the review of the Canada issue of The Literary Review in TLS of Sept 16²--said you & Reaney were the best poets & called me "the distinguished apologist for Canadian Literature"³--how’s that for a left-handed compliment? Have you read In Praise of Older Women⁴ by Vizinczey?⁵ Why don’t you write a companion piece called In Praise of Younger Women? F.R. Scott said of Older Women: "A remarkable book."⁶ If asked, my comment would be "A book which has the best description of cunnilingus I’ve ever read." What’s happening in Canada when such books can be published? Tut, tut!

Write! you old villain you--or have you decided that I am now one of the dull stuffed shirts of academia?

Love & kisses,

Dessie Pacey

¹Pacey refers to the adverse criticism which greeted Levine’s Canada Made Me across Canada; in "Round and About," a regular column in the Atlantic Advocate by "Vedette," (April 1965: 66), the news of Levine’s imminent arrival as writer-in-residence at the University of New Brunswick is reported, as well as a note on his career, mentioning his "controversial Canada Made Me."


³The Times Literary Supplement review noted:
Professor Desmond Pacey, the distinguished apologist for Canadian letters, who is the guest editor of this special number, has chosen five short stories and more than sixty poems, as well as an introductory piece by himself and a pleasant description of Manitoba by Mile Gabrielle Roy.


6. F.R. Scott made this comment in a dustjacket "blurb" of the first edition of Vizinczey's novel.

October 15, 1965
Dear Desmond,

Thank you very much for your good letter. I ought to have written sooner, but though I found an earlier letter of yours waiting for me on my desk, I was suddenly overcome by a terrible lethargy--or maybe it was a delayed sunstroke! I just couldn't face paper and ink, or was it my own thoughts? The summer wasn't altogether a happy one for me, since there was a good deal of straightening out to do with Aviva. All I can say now is that it was an exhausting two months: irritating, absurd but not profitless. Aviva and David are back, and the three of us are exceedingly pleased with one another. Aviva has her old job at Weston, but on a part-time basis, and I have a lot of free time to play with my son. I am discovering the joys of paternity. Truly, life has never been as pleasant for me, as it is just now.

While I was in Greece, Betty, Naomi and Max were staying in my apartment. I had sent some money to Betty to get herself another car to make the trip with, but before I left she was still undecided whether she'd come. Well, she did, and she had a wonderful time here, meeting all her old friends, especially Audrey and Louise. Since my return I've been getting wonderful reports about my daughter. Everyone speaks of her in the most enthusiastic terms, of her naturalness, intelligence, and charm. Of course I drink in thirstily all their compliments. You know I visited Betty and Naomi the previous summer. Since then Naomi has been writing to me quite regularly, and all her letters are affectionate and very sensible. I've promised her a thousand dollars when she graduates from high school so that she can go to Greece and see all the marvellous things I saw there this summer. Perhaps I shall make the trip with her.

Max is in Vancouver, working in a bookstore and revising the first draft of his completed novel. A number of people who've seen parts or chapters of it tell me he's done something really good and think it's publishable. I hope so. I understand I'm the hero or protagonist of his novel, and that he sees me as someone terribly victimized by women. Some of the scenes are supposed to be hilarious. Well, some of them were! Maybe one day I'll sit down and write my memoirs--but would it be fair to my wives?

No, my good friend, I never received my copy of the Literary Review. Did you ask the editor to send me one? I'd certainly like to have one--have you a spare copy you could let me have? Nor did I see the TLS review. I'd like to see that too.

I'm very glad you like the book and think so highly of it. I'm very pleased with the selection I made, though it
was not made without a good deal of heartburning. I almost
drove myself mad, putting in and taking out poems, and even
now I have one or two regrets for poems I kept out of the
volume. Say: "Afternoon of A Coupon-Clipper"—why in the
devil did I omit that one from the collection? Or the
poignant "Mother, This Is Spring". Ah well, maybe ten
years from now McStew will bring out another Collected, and
this time I'll shoot the works. Yes, I did write several
things this summer. You'll be seeing them in the Canadian
Forum and the QQ! They're not terribly ambitious pieces;
nevertheless, I wish they were in the Collected. I've
written another few poems since getting back, and I've sent
these to Quarry, the magazine Tom Marshall edits in
Kingston. You've probably seen copies of it. One of the
poems is called "The Air Is Sultry". I think it's probably
the best lyric I've written in recent years. But damn it
all, I want to get down to writing some prose!

Leonard finished his second novel, and it was
accepted by his American publisher, Viking Press, as well as
by McStew. If you think IPOOW is salacious, wait till you
see Cohen's book. I believe he has a scene in which a
machine performs to give a woman an orgasm that will make
all your pubic hairs stand on end.

It was very good of you to overlook my sloth or
lethargy. It's always a pleasure to hear from you.
Remember me, please, to Norman. All my love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

1 Aviva was teaching at the Weston School for Girls in Westmount.
2 Audrey (Aikman) Sutherland, see 37.5.
3 Louise Scott, see 36.1.
5 ---. "Mother, This is Spring," Here and Now np.
10 Quarry was founded in 1951 as an undergraduate student annual at Queen's University; with
   issue 14 (summer 1964) the magazine changed from an annual to a quarterly format with its range
   expanding to include writers from across Canada and the United States; Marshall was chief editor nos
   13 (March 1964) to 19.4 (summer 1970).
Tom Marshall (b. 1938), poet (The Silences of Fire 1969; The White City 1976), novelist (Adele at the End of the Days 1987), and short story writer (Glass Houses 1985); founder of Quarry and Professor of English at Queen's University.


"Book Two: A Long Letter from F." contains the encounter between Edith and the Danish Vibrator (173-80).

[s.c.](late October, 1965) Louis Dudek, "Irving Layton--a Vicarious Rebel," rev. of Collected Poems by Irving Layton, Montreal Gazette, 25 Oct. 1965.[ms: How's this for a fine, candid, objective review? Poor Louis...IPL...How do you like this for honest reviewing (2 passages circled))

550.[pc] [December 12, 1965pm]

FREEDOM

I said it before
but with desperation, tears
( just like a poet!)
fist clenched white
and with raised voice
--so I did not mean it, after all.

Now I say 'I am free'
and scarcely whisper the words
yet the walls of an entire city
tremble and fall.

Irving Layton

Irving Layton, "Freedom," Periods of the Moon 76.


551.[pc] [April 18, 1966]

On Seeing A Signboard at Erskine Church

How amazing it is that the Prince of Peace
Who loved the birds, the tender lambs that totter
Should be served by ministers with names like these:
The Reverend Drs Butcher and Slaughter.
Irving Layton

1Irving Layton, "Presbyterian Church Signboard," Periods of the Moon 59.

552. April 20, 1966
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your amusing postcard re the Butcher & the Slaughter. It broke a long silence. What's the trouble?

Read Leonard Cohen's novel last night--can't say I liked it.1 I must be oldfashioned, for I don't respond at all to that kind of writing. His obsession with cunnilingus & fellatio seems to me neurotic.

Have had the busiest year yet—in the office every night & all day Saturdays & Sundays. Am just about on the point of collapse.

Since seeing you in Vancouver in October I've made only two trips—to Port Arthur in February, where I gave a public lecture at Lakehead University, and to Boston in January (I drove Mary Ann for her Woodrow Wilson fellowship interview. She won a fellowship & will be going on to graduate work next year).2 I go to Toronto for a meeting this Sunday.

I wrote one very long (26pp) short story just before Xmas, and sent it to Encounter.3 They said they liked it—and they still have it, though no word of when they will publish it. I have two other stories to write once the rush subsides.

I am writing my book4 on Ethel Wilson5—have all the novels done & have only the introduction & conclusion left to do.

I've been invited to apply for the Readership in Commonwealth Studies at Cambridge, & have tossed my hat into the ring.

Love to Aviva.

As ever,
Des Pacey

1Pacey later changed his opinion; see 560.

2Mary Ann Pacey received her Master of Arts from the University of Toronto in 1967.

3Encounter did not publish a Pacey story.


5Ethel Wilson (1888-1980), Vancouver novelist (Swamp Angel 1954), and short story writer (Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories 1961).
Dear Desmond,

Forgive my not writing sooner. I was very glad to get your letter, and wanted to answer it right away, but I had three projects looming in my frazzled mind: getting Max ready for his departure to Israel where he’s going to study at the University of Jerusalem; editing an anthology of workshop poems,1 and seeing it brought out (I’ll be getting copies sometime this week) and lastly, attending to the details of my own departure for West Germany where I’m going for a three-week visit at the invitation of the Bonn government.2 I shall be giving readings and lectures at several universities, Danke Schon und Bitten-ing3 all over the place. I’ve got mixed feelings about the whole venture, but I felt I couldn’t turn down an invitation like that.

After that’s over, I shall probably bed down somewhere in the south of France—Vence or Arles. I’ve another book of poems on the way.4 Viking Press is interested in bringing out my Selected Poems next spring,5 and I’ve been told to go ahead and begin the sifting. So when I’m not lying on my back and looking at the clouds, I shall be happily composing new poems or fingering the old ones. It ought to be a pleasant summer, altogether different from the hectic one I experienced last year.

Why haven’t I written? It may have been a menopausal year, and troubles, some imaginary and some very real. It’s only lately that I feel I’ve gotten on top of them, and see an unobstructed road ahead of me. As always, out of the confused mess of myself and the world, I’ve written some good poems. Tam Review has about six of them for their next issue.6 I think you’ll like them. Did you receive an earlier PC I sent you: a poem called "Freedom"?7

That’s great news about your short story and the possibility of your becoming the Reader in Commonwealth Studies at Cambridge. Nothing is too good for you; you deserve the best. You have my prayers and good wishes. I’ll write you from Germany. Love to Mary.

Yours, Irving

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2Layton embarked on a three week visit at the invitation of the West German government May-June 1966.

3German: thank you and please.


7550.
554. November 12, 1966
Dear Irving,

I have to go up to Ottawa for a meeting on Friday Dec 2, & shall be coming back on Saturday Dec 3. If you would be interested, I might arrange to stay over in Montreal that Saturday night & come back to Fredericton on Sunday. I should very much like to see you & Aviva again, & we might take in a nightclub that night, or see a good film, or just sit & talk—whatever you feel like. But are you to be free then? And would it be convenient for you to put me up that night, or shall I get a hotel room?

My anthology for senior high school students, Our Literary Heritage,1 is now off the press, & your poems bring it to a magnificent conclusion.2

My book on Ethel Wilson has now been approved by the Twayne editors & has gone to press.

Mary & I were at Bishop’s this past weekend, where Mary opened an exhibition of her recent paintings & drawings3 & I gave a lecture on Canadian literature.4 We stayed with the Gustafsons at North Hatley.

A.J.M. Smith comes here on Thursday for a four day visit.5 We are having a big party for him on Saturday night.

Alfred Purdy6 comes to read his poems a week after Smith, & Birney is coming in February.7 Are you about ready to make a second visit to UNB?

All the best,

Des

1See 319.1.


3"Mary Pacey: Paintings and Drawings," Bishop’s University, 4-25 Nov. 1966.

4Desmond Pacey, "Hundred Year Harvest,: a Century of English-Canadian Literature," (lecture to the Humanities Association," Bishop’s University, Lennoxville, Quebec, 4 November 1966.


Smith, poetry reading, University of New Brunswick, 18 November 1966.


8Earle Birney, poetry reading, University of New Brunswick, 12 February 1967.
November 28, 1966.

In Toronto for Reading

Delighted to see you Saturday

Layton

Irving Layton, poetry reading, University of Toronto, 28 Nov. 1966.

December 9, 1966

Dear Irving & Aviva,

I want to thank you most sincerely for your splendid hospitality over the weekend. I enjoyed every minute of my stay with you. Irving’s poems are terrific, & Aviva’s dance was a masterpiece of erotic enticement. I shall look forward to a repetition of both performances when I next pass your way! I also enjoyed the delicious meals, the good talk, & the ringside seat at the nightclub.

Now I must prepare for an honours seminar this afternoon on Ben Jonson’s verse—see you soon!

Love,

Des

December 29, 1966

Dear Desmond,

At this late date I do wish to thank you for the very lovely note you sent Aviva and me. It gave us both a great deal of pleasure. We still talk about your visit and the good time we had together. I promise you more of the same on your next visit to us.

The past two years have been exceedingly painful ones for me, full of anguish and confusion. It was a lucky thing for me I was able to have a holiday in Nice this summer, otherwise I might have cracked under the strain. Maybe not—I come from tough stock.

Anyway, I’m on smooth ground again and I think I shall stay on it from now on. I’m glad, Desmond, of all the experiences I’ve had up to now—good or bad—and rejoice in your friendship and all that it has meant to me over the years.

I thought I’d let you know—this being the season for taking stock and counting one’s blessings.

Love,

Irving

1Layton spent May, June and July 1967 in Nice, France.
Dear Irving,

Thank you for your card and note, written on December 29, which has only this afternoon reached me. I am sorry to hear that the last two years have been so hard for you. I don’t understand why, though I have inklings of some possible causes.

I am glad you & Aviva enjoyed my last visit. I certainly enjoyed it. It should be possible to get together again soon. I shall be travelling up to Ottawa almost every weekend this winter, and from March 8-12 I am to be a Centennial Lecturer at Sir George Williams.¹

As a matter of fact I may be able to see you again this coming weekend, January 14. I go up to Ottawa Thursday night, & for the next two days serve as one of a national committee of three to divide up ½ million dollars among university libraries. If the committee completes its work by Saturday evening, I shall try to get down to Montreal by plane or train & stay over with you till Sunday. I know this is pretty indefinite but I have no way of knowing just when our deliberations will end. So don’t change any other plans you may have—-but do try to let me know if you are going to be away or otherwise engaged. And if I see that I can get down from Ottawa that Saturday night, I will phone you or wire you that afternoon.

I hope that Aviva’s body is as beautiful as ever—I’m sure it is.

I could tell you a lot of news—I seem suddenly to be in great demand on the national cultural scene—but I’ll keep it for conversation.

Thank you so much for your letter and for saying how much my friendship has meant to you. I can assure you that yours has meant even more to me. So often your cheery letters & wires & phone calls have reinvigorated me when I was in danger of falling into depression or lethargy.

Love & kisses,
Des


559.[pc] January 10, 1967

Dear Desmond,

Wd very much like to see you this week-end, and so wd Aviva. But: my brother Hyman¹ might be flying in from San Fran this Sat nite. He phoned me long ding abt 1 mo ago to say he’d drive up the middle of January. I’ve not heard from him since, but as I say, there’s a good poss we might be having the frater for a stay of several weeks.
I’ll be making a big wonderful bash for Periods of the Moon some time in Feb. Any chance of your coming down for that?

It was 2 yrs of anguish & ecstasy. When poets aren’t writing poems, their life & talk is bad melodrama.

Love,
Irv

See 275.10.

February 1, 1967

Dear Irving & Aviva,

You will think me a lout for not having written before this to thank you for your hospitality on Saturday & Sunday Jan 21-2. I can only plead that since getting back I have been inundated with duties of one sort or another.

I did very much enjoy my brief stay with you--even though we were all so tired that we did not "swing" as we sometimes do. I hope Irving enjoyed his movie as much as I did!

I go up to Ottawa this Sunday & come back Monday night--so this time there will be no opportunity for a stopover. I shall be going again Feb 17 to 19, but again there will be no chance of dropping in on you as my meetings run all through Saturday night and Sunday. So it looks as if my next opportunity of seeing you will be during my visit to Sir George Williams, March 8-12.

In any spare moments I have, I have been re-reading Leonard’s books to prepare for my lecture on him. I think his poetry has fallen off badly of late, but Beautiful Losers impresses me more each time I read it. It has complexity & ingenuity of allusion & symbolism almost to the degree of Joyce’s Ulysses1, & I am amazed at Leonard’s erudition. A few things still bother me though. Do you know what he is getting at by F’s soap collection?

Patricia (my 20 yr old daughter) is writing her term essay for Fred Cogswell on Irving Layton’s poetry. She thinks Irving is the greatest! She has just written a short story herself which would not shame Katherine Mansfield,2 and her Creative Writing instructor wants her to expand it into a novel.

Love & best wishes to you both.

Sincerely,
Des Pacey x x

1James Joyce, Ulysses (Paris: Shakespeare, 1926).

2Patricia Pacey, "White Socks," Intervales 7 (Spring 1967).
February 6, 1967

Dear Desmond,

A pity you couldn’t have made it this weekend. Barry Callaghan of the Toronto Telegram was over for supper, and I had some friends meet him. You might have found the evening worthwhile.

By all means come along in March. The only catch is that I leave for Windsor University on the 11th to take part in some kind of festival over there. But since you’ll be here on the 8th, we’ll still have some time for our favorite belly-dancers.

I’d like to see your daughter’s paper since I share her enthusiasm for my own poetry.

Love to you & Mary,

Irving

PS Hi Sexy! love from Aviva.

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1Barry Callaghan (b. 1937), journalist, broadcaster, poet (The Hogg Poems and Drawings 1978), founder and editor of Exile, Professor of English at York University 1968-present.


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4530 Girouard Ave,
Montreal, Quebec
February 26, 1967

Dear Desmond,

Thank you very warmly for the book and for so decisively making me a part of the "heritage". You’ve made a judicious selection of my poems. I especially appreciate the fact its my "Bull Calf" that is the last poem in the book, making it appear as though everything leads up to it. "From Beowulf to Bull Calf" will now replace "From Beowulf to Virginia Woolf". About time too!

I’ve been waiting for some hardbacked copies of Periods of the Moon to come, so that I could send you one. They’ll probably arrive about the middle of the week, and I’ll be able to give you a POM when you come here for your show at Sir GW. I won’t be able to hear you on Thursday night since I have a class that evening, but I shall be listening to you when you talk on the phenomenon of Leonard Cohen. I think you’re going to have good turnouts for both addresses.

Wynne Francis says you’re staying in Montreal until the 13th. As luck would have it, I shall be leaving for Windsor, Ont on the 11th to take part with Bowering and several others in an arts festival the university there is putting on. I shd be back by the 12th, however, and maybe we can see some belly-dancers to rinse our souls of all the high-minded seriousness that goes with all the talk about poetry.

I’ve an unlisted number now: 488-5506.
I’m including some recent clippings that might interest you.
Thanks for the lovely inscription.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving

1See 554.3.

563. February 27, 1967
Dear Irving,
Are you mad at me or something? I sent you my anthology as a Valentine, & haven’t heard a word.
I am scheduled to come up for my Sir GW lecture on March 9 at lunchtime & stay till Saturday afternoon. I believe you sent me a note saying you were going out of town on this Saturday, but I can’t lay my hand on the note at the moment. Thursday night I have dinner with Compton & Wynne Francis & then give my first lecture; Friday from 1-2 I lecture on Leonard Cohen; but Friday night is still free. Could I spend that evening with you & Aviva, or will you be on your way?

Love & kisses,
Des P

564. March 1, 1967
Dear Irving,
Thanks for your letter of Feb 26. I’m glad you liked Our Literary Heritage & your part of it.
I’ve finished my lecture on Cohen & I think it is quite an exciting one. The other lecture, which you’ll miss, will be more routine.
Tish has finished her essay on you & it is good. She thinks your poems about time & death are your best.
I’ll be looking forward to Periods of the Moon.
Now about our possible time together in Mtl next week. It’s too bad you’re going away on the Saturday, as that was to be my clear day. As it is, it looks as if Friday evening the 10th will have to be the time of our get-together. I wonder if Wynne or anyone at Sir GW plans a party for that night? If so, presumably we could meet there. If not, you & I & Aviva could go to a night-club or a movie that night or, if you preferred, have a quiet evening at your place. If I have survived the two lectures--& for some reason I am teribly nervous about them--I shall feel like celebrating that night. I always have fun when I am with you, so I don’t really care what we do.
Since you are to be away on the 11th & presumably most of the 12th, I think I shall keep my air ticket to return on
Saturday afternoon, but I probably could defer it until the Sunday afternoon if there were any point in doing so.

I may say that I have now read Beautiful Losers eight times, & that I now think it is a terrifically clever & intricate novel--much more carefully done than I thought on a first hasty reading.

Love & kisses,
Des P

565. [pc]  March 6, 1967
Dear Desmond,

Our letters must have crossed. Shucks, I’m scheduled to meet a class at the Univ of Windsor and lecture to it on "Recent Trends in Cdn Poetry"--Fri afternoon! I won’t be sitting in yr lecture on the P of Cohen after all. I’m greatly disappointed.

You will publish it somewhere, though, won’t you? I haven’t heard, but I guess there will be a party for you Friday evening. If there isn’t, why don’t you & Aviva go to a night-club, and I’ll join you in spirit.

My reading at NYU1 was a huge success. The Dean wondered whether I cd be enticed to come there if a Professorship at $19,000 were dangled in front of me. I can’t! I leave for the Orient next year.2

Love,
Irving

[s.c.]: ms review of The Periods of the Moon

1Irving Layton, poetry reading, New York University, March 1967.

2In 1968, Layton travelled to India and Nepal.

566.  March 13, 1967
Dear Irving,

It was very good of you to come back to Sir George after your lecture on Thursday night. If you hadn’t come the aftermath of my lecture would have been very dull indeed.

Sorry you had to miss the Cohen--it was a lecture with a good deal of thought behind it & it would have given me a fillip to know that you were there.

Aviva & I had a pleasant time together Friday evening. I’m afraid I was a bit too exhausted by the ordeal of the Cohen performance to be very exciting company, but we had an excellent dinner together at Le Caveau and then saw a very subtle & suggestive film. I dropped in at your flat for a cup of tea--yes, that’s all I wanted--after the film, but my behaviour was very discreet. It felt very strange to be in your flat when you were not there.

I hope that my review of Periods of the Moon finally reached you. I’m afraid it’s not one of my best reviews but at least it should do something for your sales. I should
have gone on to some stylistic criticism of the poems, but I was tired when I wrote it & I had to do it quickly to catch the deadline for the next issue.

When will you be leaving for the Riviera? It would be nice if we could get together again once more before you go. I go up to Ottawa for a meeting on April 1, & might stay over in Montreal for half a day or so on my way back here.

Yours sincerely,
Des Pacey

March 13, 1967

Dear Desmond,

Just a note to tell you how much I appreciate your review of POM.1 You always write well about me, with a certain sparkle and élan. But I think you outdid yourself in this review. You really captured the mood of the poems, their bitter gaiety, and your observations and comments are right on the mark. I shall be a pilgrim, a wanderer all my life. This week I’m resigning my post as poet-in-residence: who in hell wants to be a tamed poetic cat? I’m burning all my bridges behind me, and in May I shall be off to wherever the spirit moves me. The great poems are still ahead of me, but they will not be out of my reach forever.

Love,
Irving


March 22, 1967

Dear Irving,

Thank you very much for sending me the copy of Periods of the Moon, with the very kind & heart-warming dedication.1 When is it that you take off for foreign parts? I expect to be coming to a meeting in Montreal on April 8 (Saturday) & could stay over until Sunday if you are to be available & would like me to do. If not, I shall return to Fredericton that evening.

Woodcock has accepted my piece on Cohen for Canadian Lit2—he says he finds the article a very exciting one.3

All the best,
Des

1"March 18, 1967. For Desmond & Mary in deep appreciation of all your friendship has meant to me all these many good years. Irving."


3George Woodcock, letter to Desmond Pacey, 16 March 1967, Pacey Papers, National Archives.
Dear Desmond,

Please excuse the delay in writing to you. I’ve been hopping in & out of the city; was at Queen’s for a two-day session: reading & panel discussion.¹ Saw George Whalley who made a small party for me consisting of the Eng Lit professoriat. I had a very pleasant time, trying at first to bait them, then settling for good discussion on the future of Can Po and Whalley’s sad toothsome smile flashing through the conversational murk.

Congrats! I heard wonderful things about your Cohen paper. Wynne Francis says it’s the most brilliant you’ve done and one of the best things she’s ever heard. I’m looking forward eagerly to seeing & reading it in Can Lit. I suppose it will appear in the forthcoming issue.

I’d love to see you Saturday. Let’s go out to some club in the evening dressed like a couple of Bacchanalian satyrs. It’ll be my send-off, since I’m planning to leave for Europe around the 21st of April. I’ll return for the fall publication of the Selected Poems² and then it’s Asia.

My phone no. is HIS 8-5506. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

¹Irving Layton, poetry reading, Queen’s University, March 1967.


Dear Oiving,

I’d made my Air Canada reservations before getting your letter--so I’m set to return by a 6:30 flight Sat evening. I’ll leave it like that for now, & can defer in Montreal if necessary. I think my meeting will be over by 1 pm--so I’ll call you in the early afternoon & we can decide whether (a) to spend the afternoon together (b) to spend the evening together (c) to spend the night together!!!

Love & kisses--news when I see you you dog!

Des P
April 9, 1967

Dear Desmond,

What in the name of heaven happened to you! I waited all morning for your phone call, then I waited for your good-natured hum of a voice from 5:30 pm on: SILENCE. Didn’t you come into town after all? Didn’t you receive my letter earlier in the week? I asked Aviva whether you had phoned her, but of course you hadn’t.

Too bad. I did want to see you before leaving for France-Sud. Tomorrow I resign as poet-in-residence. I expect to stay away from Montreal for several years. I’m thinking of buying a house in Vence, or somewhere in Italy. I’m tired of the rotten Cdn winters, tired of all the silly time-wasting, energy-consuming distractions. I want to get down to writing poems: that, and nothing else. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving


Vence is a village in southern France.

April 10, 1967

Dear Irving,

As so often seems to happen, we apparently got our wires crossed re Saturday. My meeting ended, as I had told you I thought it would, about 1 pm, & I then called the number you gave me--no reply. Mike Gnarowski & I went out together for lunch, & from the restaurant I called your number again at 1:30, 2, and 2:30--again no reply. As my plane was scheduled to leave at 6:30, which meant leaving the centre of the city at 5:30, I gave up after that & went to see the film Blow-Up\(^1\) before catching the bus for the airport.

I suppose this means I won’t see you again before you leave for Europe. That’s a pity. I do hope you have [a] good summer & that you will get a lot of writing done. Will you drop me the odd line about your progress?

Our friendship has meant a great deal to me over the years and I hope that your plans to become increasingly peripatetic won’t mean the end of our relationship.

Yours sincerely,
Des

\(^1\)Blow-Up, dir Michelangelo Antonini, Bellevue/MGM, 1966.
573. April 12, 1967

Dear Irving,

Thanks for yours of April 9.

So sorry we got our wires crossed. I’m sure I said I’d phone you in the early afternoon, & that then we’d decide what to do & I’d defer my flight home till Sunday if necessary.

If you really mean it about staying away from Montreal for several years I’m going to miss you horribly. My visits to Montreal will no longer be any fun.

What’s eating you? You’ve always struck me as such a happy person--& this country, for all its faults, is worth fighting for--at least there’s hope for it, whereas Europe, I feel, has had its hour of glory & can do nothing but decline.

And hell--how can you expect to be more productive, "poetry-wise", than you’ve been the last fifteen years?

We should have had a good heart to heart talk. Lately I’ve felt you haven’t really told me what is in your heart--our conversations have remained polite exercises in evasion. I probably couldn’t do or say anything helpful--but I’m a good listener, & I’m honest & discreet.

What a pity we missed the opportunity! Well, we’ve had some great times together, & I do hope we manage more--somehow, somewhere.

Love,
Des

574. April 24, 1967

Dear Desmond,

I should have answered your good letter days ago, but I’ve been busy with so many things--my own uncertain moods & feelings among them--that I couldn’t make myself sit down to write you. Your last letter cheered me up a great deal; it established our long-standing friendship in the perspective I hope it will always keep for us. You’ve been very good for me, and I’ve learned much--at least I hope I have--from your wisdom, patience, humility. And though you’re a Goy, you’ve got a Jewish heart--a real tenderness, the sort that is becoming rarer & rarer in these brutal days.

You’re one very good reason why I don’t want to leave this country. Whatever gave you the idea I was intending to cut the umbilical ties that bind me to it? I really don’t. I shall remain a Canadian wherever I go, or finally settle down. Last week I was informed by Peter Dwyer¹ that I had been granted a special Arts Award² so that I can live and write in Asia. Ain’t that somethin! I’m excited by the visions my poor head has had to harbour since I’ve heard the great news. Kashmir, India, Burma, Hong Kong, Singapore, Tokyo--and many, many other fabulous places the poets & novelists have inflamed my imagination with. Ah, to be 55, with money in one’s pockets, and dreams of geisha girls, houris in one’s head.
I leave for Lisbon, May 14th. From there I shall go to Spain, finally settling once again in the south of France, but not Nice this time—something off the tourist junket. I’ve had recommended a place called Bandol, about 30 miles east of Marseilles, on the Medit. coast. I’ll look in on it, and if it lives up to its good name, I’ll stay there for about four or five months, then start moving eastward to Turkey, Israel, Kashmir...I plan to be out of Canada for about 2 years. After that, I shall see. I’m finding it hard to take the Canadian winters. It’s not the cold I mind, but the absence of sun. For a Zoroastrian like myself 5 mos without sun are hard to take.

When I get settled I shall write you a long letter, and maybe enclose some poems.

Love,
Irving

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1Peter Dwyer (b. 1937), Canada Council official.

2Layton was awarded a Canada Council special arts award of seven thousand dollars plus travel expenses to live in Asia.

3Zoroastrianism was founded in the eighth or seventh century BC by Zarathustra (or Zoroaster) who believed that a new world will soon come about, with this second existence thought of as carried out on earth forever; its central symbols are fire and the sun.

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575. April 27, 1967
Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of April 24. As usual, you are far too kind to me in suggesting that you have learned certain virtues from me. The only virtue to which I can lay any claim is honesty, and that is by no means absolute. I am only too conscious of the fact that at times, as a critic, I have said things because they were the diplomatic or fashionable things to say—but on the whole I have tried with some success to clear my mind of the idols of the tribe.1 And it is because of your own honesty as a poet & as a man, that I admire you.

Congratulations on the Canada Council award. I shall envy you as you sit Buddha-like in the Oriental shade or, in other moods, essay the pleasant postures of the Tantric arts of love.2

Was it I who recommended Bandol to you? I know it well. I was attracted to it by the fact that Katherine Mansfield & D.H. Lawrence both spent time there in the twenties3—and the Pacey family spent a most pleasant week there in April 1963.4 It is a lovely place—in a pocket of hills right on the edge of the Mediterranean, & a harbour full of gaily coloured pleasure craft & fishing boats. It is a tourist centre, but mainly for the French—and thus has the authentic Gallic atmosphere. Be sure to hunt up a tiny
restaurant on one of the back streets—I forget the name, but it has wonderful full course dinners at 5 NF for everything including wine.

What will Aviva do while you are away? Do you want me to call on her when I am in Montreal, or would you rather I did not? Or is she going with you? Or back to Australia?

Love,
Des Pacey

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1"There are four classes of Idols which beset men's minds. To these for distinction's sake I have assigned names--calling the first class, Idols of the Tribe..." Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (162) Aphorism 39.

2Tantrism is a pan-Indian religious movement within both Buddhism and Hinduism stressing development of dormant psychological powers by means of meditation and ritual techniques including physical, iconographic or mental use of sexual forces and symbols.

3Katherine Mansfield wintered in Bandol from November 1915 to April 1916 and from January to March 1918; D.H. Lawrence lived in Bandol from November 1928 to March 1929 and from September 1929 to February 1930.

4See 464.

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Dear Desmond,

Bandol proved too expensive, so here I am back again in Nice. I intend to stay here for several months and then go off to Asia. I've already written 3 poems—nothing great, but I haven't hit my stride yet. I love Nice and will probably settle here after my Asian trip. Montreal, however, will always be my 1st home. Teach at Sir GW for six mos, live in Nice for six mos. Wouldn't that be an ideal arrangement?

I'll write again when I have a permanent address.

Love,
Irv

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577. October 14, 1967
Dear Irving,

I hear via the grapevine that you are back in Montreal & reunited with Aviva. I hope both rumours are correct.

I write in haste to let you know that I expect to be coming to Montreal on October 29 and staying till November 3—first for a conference of the Canadian Assn of Graduate Schools (of which I am president) & then of the Universities of Canada (to which I read a paper on "Research in the Humanities"). I am coming up Sunday afternoon October 29, & my official duties don't begin till Monday morning. Could we get together for that first Sunday evening, to make sure of having a good chat? I'll be staying at the Sheraton-Mount Royal.
I leave this Wednesday for four days at the University of Alberta, where I am to give three lectures on Canadian Literature.\textsuperscript{2}

Have just come through one of the busiest weeks ever--our Fall Convocation, at which we had all kinds of dignitaries including Bobby Kennedy.\textsuperscript{3} Tish (my 2nd daughter) won two prizes (for Creative Writing & best short story) so got to shake hands with Bobby twice--& the second time he said several sentences to her--so she is very thrilled.

Was in Boston for Thanksgiving weekend & saw the film of Joyce's \textit{Ulysses}.\textsuperscript{4} Have you seen it yet? Longing to hear all your news.

Love & Kisses,
Des


\textsuperscript{2}Pacey, "Hundred Year Harvest: A Century of Canadian Literature," Centennial Lecture at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, 19 October 1967.


\textsuperscript{3}Robert Kennedy (1925-68), US Senator (1965-68) received an honorary Doctor of Laws from UNB in 1967.


Dear Desmond,

Your grapevine has yielded the right kind of juice: I am back in Montreal, and Aviva and I are back together again, living quiet, thoughtful lives. The separation seems to have worked its usual magic. I've returned to a wonderfully changed woman who finally has understood what I meant by a poem I wrote a long time ago--to be exact about the date, when I left Betty: "Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom."\textsuperscript{1} We are getting on splendidly, our only disagreement being over politics, or rather Vietnam. I'm all the way with LBJ, and Aviva is convinced that the war and its escalation are inexorably moving the world towards disaster.\textsuperscript{2} All our tensions are drained through this sluice of disagreement, and for the rest we have only smiles and caresses for each other. What's more, I don't think a separation will again be needed, we've both sufficiently matured now to take the catastrophe of marriage in our stride, and even to turn it into some benefit for both of us. I guess one could say the same for life itself.

I had a great summer of writing, and I've another book scheduled for this coming January. It's called \textit{The}
Shattered Plinths. 3 Perhaps you’ve seen the four poems I have in the Sept issue of the Canadian Forum. 4 They, as well as some more you’ll be seeing in Tam Rev 5 and the QQ, 6 will give you some idea of what my muse was up to in the south of France. It was a wonderfully creative time. Now I’m at work on another volume, preparatory to my departure for the Orient this coming December. 7

Desmond, we’ll be delighted to see you in Montreal. We’ll be expecting you for supper on Sunday, Oct 29th. I’m looking forward to a good long talk with you, since both of us have a lot of blank spaces to fill in. I’m happy for all the good things that have happened to you—you must be very proud of your daughter. Bravo! Give her my warmest felicitations. And to Mary, my love.

Hugs & kisses,
Irving

1See 151.5.

2The period between February 1966 and January 1968 witnessed a vast increase in the size of the forces involved in the Vietnam War; bombing raids on North Vietnam also intensified throughout 1967.


7Layton travelled to Israel before spending early 1968 in India and Nepal.

579. October 25, 1967

Dear Irving,

Thanks for yours of the 18th. I’m delighted with your news.

I’ll probably go to my hotel to get settled in Saturday afternoon, & then call you & come out for supper. I am looking forward very much to seeing you & Aviva again.

I had a hectic but quite thrilling time in Edmonton—on the go every minute for the four days—but I’ll tell you all about it when I see you. I’ve seldom seen such enthusiasm for Can Lit—a real breakthrough.

Love & Kisses,
Des
December 2, 1967

Dear Desmond,

It looks as if I shall have a copy of The Shattered Plinths in my hands on the 18th of this month. My fingers, of course, have begun to itch terribly. It’s going to be a much handsomer book than Periods of the Moon, and I’ve your say-so that some of its contents are superior also. I won’t be in the country to see for myself what the response to it will be, and get the reviews hot off the griddle: all that will reach me in muted form in Israel, I suppose, where I expect to live the next two or three months. I shall probably leave Montreal around the 20th unless Aviva persuades me to stay until Xmas eve.

I’ve written several poems since you were here, one of them, “The Equalizer”, as good a lyric as I’ve ever done. I sent it, along with five more poems, to the Can Forum, and I’m waiting to hear from Milton Wilson about them. I’m working on another book, a sort of music-on-a-kazoosh one, which I’ve called The Indelicate Touch. It should be ready for publication in 1969.

At the moment I’m embroiled in a war of my own making. An imp pushes me always to see for myself how idiotic and bigoted people can be; or to demonstrate to myself how insecure they are, and how necessary conformity is to their survival. Because I refuse to go along with the simplistic views of the leftists on the Vietnam war, I’ve been called "fascist," "a spokesman for the Birch society," etc and I’ve managed to create a lynching mentality. I’d laugh even more loudly than I do, weren’t it all so revolting and predictable. It doesn’t take much psychological insight to see what prompts so much of their outbursts against me is the meaninglessness and sterility of the times, and their need to find some cause that [will] fill up the inner void. Vietnam is the large black bead in the rosary of the desiccated N.A. intellectual.

One of the sad things about the cultural life in our country is that there is no true liberal centre, but that the NDP and its assorted hangers-on have become the only spokesmen for change or social reform. Their bigotry and deviousness are almost as bad as that of the communists. And this babbitry—phew, it’s disgusting. The NDP mentality is Canadian methodism brought up to date.

Regards from Aviva.

Hugs,

Irving


1See 578.7.

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of Dec 2, which came in yesterday. I shall be looking forward to seeing your new book of poems. I expect my book of children's verse¹ to be published a week today (with lovely line drawings by Mary) & I shall be sending your David a copy for Xmas. Hope it just gets there before you leave for Israel.

My Ethel Wilson book² will be out in January, they say. Jack McClelland wrote to say how much he liked my Leonard Cohen piece & suggested he might publish a book of my critical essays with the Cohen as the title piece--so I've assembled 24 of my critical essays on Can lit & sent the bunch to him!³

I've written my piece for the Purdy book on the USA⁴--not as pro-American as yours but not violently anti-American either. Purdy liked it--"interesting & well-written."⁵

Don't be surprised if I phone you this weekend. I go to Ottawa tomorrow afternoon for Canada Council business & return Sunday night. If I have any stopover time in Mtl I'll call you. If weather should interfere with flying I might even stay with you Sunday night--but don't count on me. I'd love to see you before you go.

Give my love to Aviva & say regards are not enough!

As ever, with love,

Des Pacey

¹Desmond Pacey, The Cat, the Cow and the Kangaroo illus. Mary Pacey (Fredericton: Brunswick, 1967).

²See 552.7.


⁵Al Purdy, letter to Desmond Pacey, 2 December 1967, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

Love from Laytons.

I think I've already sent you one, but I'm not sure. Here's another, just in case. Love.

[Aviva's handwriting]
718

Dear Desmond,

I’m glad The Shattered Plinths pleases. The book might have been more impressively produced, but McStew likes to economize on things like the quality of the paper, format, etc. It makes me rage when I see a book of poems brought out shabbily, my own or anyone else’s. Some time ago I saw several poetry bks that had been printed in Poland—they were so lovely to look at and to touch. It seems to me that poetry should always be heralded in some especial way like the announcement of royalty at a ball. Such heralding is nothing but its due.

"Marché Municipale" looks much more impressive in Adam in the Cndn number Fred Cogswell edited than it does in The Shattered Plinths. I hope you’ve seen it. It must have been the tug from my subconscious that made me dedicate the poem to you, the part that tucked away in one of my brain-folds the telling of your market experience in Hamilton. I’m delighted to find there’s that link between you and M.M.—and between you and me, since much of my childhood was spent in the old Bonsecours Market where I accompanied my mother on her buying ventures. My poem "The Execution" was written out of the memory of that experience.

Last week the Cogswells had us out for supper in the China Garden. We all enjoyed ourselves. I like Fred immensely; one of the most humane men I’ve ever met. He’s a bit of a monologuist, but there’s no brag in his words, or any other offensive matter in them. There’s a great deal of kindness in him, simple goodness. He’s sometimes hard to understand because of his speech defect; very often, I suppose, I laugh at the wrong places. Aviva is also very fond of him.

Well, my passport arrived yesterday morning. Finally. I shall stay over for the weekend, then leave for Athens on Monday. Leonard has asked me to spend a couple of weeks with him at Ydra, then I’ll leave for Istanbul and Tel Aviv. The plan now is for Aviva and David to join me in Israel around Easter. Of course I shan’t be able to stay in Israel for much longer after she arrives, since I’ll have to push off for India, Borneo, etc. I don’t expect to return to Montreal before Sept 1969—if then. Will write you as soon as I get located.

Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

PS I like your children’s verses, and so I hope will David when he’s my age. Congrats! Where do you get all the energy?

1Irving Layton, "Marché Municipale (For Desmond Pacey)," The Shattered Plinths 28-29.

2Adam International Review, edited by Miron Grindea published a "Canada number" (313-15; 1967) compiled by Fred Cogswell; it included essays by Hugh MacLennan, George Woodcock, Jean-René
Ostiguy and Naim Kattan, short stories by Margaret Laurence, Norman Levine and Alden Nowlan, and work by thirty poets including "Marché Municipale" (23).

3Pacey grew up on a farm outside of Hamilton and attended the weekly market there.


5Fred and his wife Margaret Philomena ("Pat") (Hynes) Cogswell (1919-1984).

584. Tuesday [early January, 1968]
Dearest Dessy Wessy,

Thank you for David’s beautiful book & inscription--the first book of poems he’s had inscribed specially for him. Every single night since it arrived, David has insisted on having a selection read out again & again & again until I’ve begun to develop strange aversions towards any mentions of cats, cows, or kangaroos. So far his pet poems are "Sheep Song" (except that he’s pissed off with Mary for not having illustrated every single one of the things mentioned) & oddly enough "The Fly & the Bee." Also you’ll be happy to know that the cover’s been ripped off, the pages suitably dog-eared & there are at least ½ doz nasty-looking blobs lurking on various pages.

Yes--I’ll be at home all dates except March, at which time I’m hoping to be wailing at The Wall. Meal & movie sounds scrumptious!! Love to Mary. Kisses to you xxxx...

Aviva

Dear Oiving,

Your letter dated Jan 11 arrived Jan 11--I didn’t know your precipitate energy had communicated itself to your mailman!

I agree your book of poems isn’t as attractively bound & printed as it might be--but the contents are more important to me, & they are very good. The poems are powerful, of course, rather than pleasant, & they mark decisively a change which has been increasingly evident in your verse over the past few years. Where you once celebrated the prick, cunt & orgasm you now celebrate the bomb, knife & explosion--my only hope is that you don’t wield the bomb as frequently & expertly as you once wielded your more personal weapon. Of course I still prefer pricks and cunts and orgasms myself, but perhaps when I reach your advanced age I too shall have become a political rather than a sexual animal.

You ask me where I get all my energy, & my answer is straight from the balls!

If you had forgotten that I used to sell butter & eggs in the Municipal Market, why did you dedicate that poem to me? Were you implying that I am some sort of pimp or prostitute? Fie on you!
Glad you liked Cogswell. He is one of the salt of the earth. But his wife? A good soul, but rather prim & proper I fear.

Glad to hear (for your sake) you’re off on Monday--but my God, man, what’s all this about not being back until Sept 1969? If, as I hope, I go to Cambridge on sabbatical for 1969-70, we may not see each other again for over two years. Surely life is too short to allow such a slice to be cut out of it? At least come back to Montreal for a few weeks next winter, so that we may on at least one occasion leer together at acres of naked flesh!

Seriously, I hope you greatly enjoy your travels, & that you will keep in touch.

Love,
Des

586.[ppc] New Delhi
May 18, 1968

Dear Desmond,

Greetings and salutations!

India is a huge biological joke that has gotten out of hand.

The only Buddha smile I saw was on the buttocks of a dead and naked Indian baby on one of the sidewalks of New Delhi. Sympathy and compassion are reduced to sentimentality, middle-class virtues bobbing on an ocean of unrelievable poverty.

Yet I’ve heard more laughter and song in the shambles of darkest Old Delhi than in the hygienic suburbs of Montreal and Toronto.

Cows are sacred in India, but the farmer to get them moving pokes a long, cruel stick up their rear. My love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

587.[ppc] New Delhi
[June 11, 1968pm]

"Taj Mahal"¹

Was it the wise architect or the grief-maddened emperor who knew beauty lies in the perfect symmetry of death and love?

New Delhi
Irving Layton

¹Irving Layton, "Taj Mahal," The Whole Bloody Bird 139.
November 30, 1968

Dear Desmond,

Weren’t you supposed to be coming to Montreal—last week, two weeks ago? Aviva and I have kinda been expecting you to drop in on us but you haven’t, though lots & lots of aspiring poets with thick mss bundles have. I’ve got to get away from here or I’ll never write another line of poetry again. There’s been a cave-in since I returned from Greece and I’ve been literally buried under requests for CC recommendations, or for criticism and pointers on how to get published in magazines and anthologies. I tell you, if I had five secretaries working full-time I couldn’t cope with all of this. The bloody nuisance and shame of it all is that I try to. Must be my gangrenous Hebrew conscience!

I gave an excellent reading at the Ryerson Institute last week. Thank heaven it was taped, and it looks as if I can get a duplicate tape sent to me. A couple of weeks earlier I gave a reading at York University to some of Eli Mandel’s classes and that one also went off very well. Eli said it was the best reading he had ever heard me give, but maybe he was buttering me up so that I’d say nice things about the book he’s writing on me. It’s a magnificent book, a wonderfully creative interpretation of my poems. I couldn’t have written anything 1/100 as illuminating about them—in expression, that is, not content. He’s laid bare all my secrets, or almost all of them. But I’m still the guy that dreamed them up.

Saw your review in the current issue of The Fiddlehead. You certainly put Barry in his place—with authority and finesse. Your evaluation of Ross and Wilkinson hit the target, and I admired the relaxed way you went about doing it. Why don’t you write a book on Modern Poetry in Canada?

I enjoyed the evening I spent with you and your daughter. Very much so. She’s a lovely, sensitive woman: but then look at who her parents are. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

enclosure: "Irving Layton in Greece" (aphorisms and 5 poems) Toronto Telegram 23 Nov. 1968: 5 (For Desmond & Mary. Love, Irving).

1Dated November 31, 1968.

2Irving Layton, poetry reading, Ryerson Institute, 29 Nov. 1968.

3Layton, poetry reading, York University, 17 Nov. 1968.

Dear Desmond,

So the student activists are giving you and the other deans a rough time too. Jeans vs Deans! Your exasperation comes through, loud and clear. Why don’t you punch one of them on the button, a good hard one to put him in his place—which is obviously somewhere sprawling on the ground. I’m glad to see that Hayakawa is standing up to them in San Francisco. If university principals & deans had similar guts, the sort of thing you describe as taking place at UNB wouldn’t be possible.

Mind you, I think students have many legitimate grievances. Most of the lecturers are lousy! Many of the courses are irrelevant, and ditto for the codes that govern their conduct. Why shouldn’t they have a say in the way the university is run—in the hiring & firing of the teaching staff? At Sir George Williams, if I had the power I’d chuck out 3/4 of the dead wood gathering dust and emoluments while the bored students have to suffer during the process.

However, they are louts and barbarians, who hate the whole learning process, and it’s these storm-troopers that have to be chucked out of the universities, once they’ve been fingered. The devil of it is that in the general confusion they are able to camouflage themselves as concerned students.

Heartiest congrats on your being awarded a Leave Fellowship for 1969-70. Your Grove project ought to keep you happy, especially since it takes you to Sweden, Germany, France and Italy. It’s the scholars now who lead the most exciting lives! I’d like to see some of the short stories you’re so enthusiastic about. A volume of them and another of his letters might do a great deal to further enhance Grove’s reputation—at any rate, stimulate a greater interest in his work.

You’re a remarkable man: able to turn so easily from Cohen’s Beautiful Losers to F.P. Grove. And in between write reviews of Wilkinson, Purdy and Buckler. How do you do it?

Good to know you’ll have more time after Xmas to visit Somerled Ave. But haven’t you heard? I’ve been appointed Poet-in-Residence at the U of Guelph for the winter semester. I’ll be at Guelph from Jan 3rd to April 3rd. I’m
going to run a workshop and put on a course on the appreciation of poetry. I’m free, of course, to do whatever I like—and that’s how I like it. The administration is providing me with a three-room suite, meals and maid service. The maids I have to find for myself.

Love and lust in turn to yourself and Mary.

Irving


1In September 1968, Physics Professor Norman Strax and some student supporters began a protest against the University of New Brunswick Harriet Irving Library’s new photo-ID cards, thereby managing to shut down the library on three consecutive days. Strax was suspended and ordered to leave the campus; instead he and his followers occupied his office and were removed by police on November 11, 1968. The CAUT insisted the university resolve the case through binding arbitration, UNB refused, and CAUT censured the university. The "Strax Affair" again intensified in March 1969 as the Board of Governors voted to accept binding arbitration while a major student demonstration was held outside.

2Layton refers to a fugitive Pacey letter.

3On November 6, 1968, dissident students called for a student strike at San Francisco State College; S.I. Hayakawa, acting President, took a hard line, bringing police on campus to quell the uprisings and keep classes open.

4Pacey was awarded a 1969-70 Canada Council Leave Fellowship to research the early life of Frederick Philip Grove.


6See 588.5.


590.

December 26, 1968

Dear Desmond,

How lucky can a man get! A scar on your face? Don’t you think you look rugged and handsome enough without that extra adornment? The swooning girls will swear you got it while duelling for one of their diaphragms or pill-boxes and even the most fanatical activist on the campus will tremble when you give him one of your fierce scowls. I envy you. If I weren’t such a coward I’d push my face through the windowpane now frosted at 18 below zero.

All joking aside, I’m relieved to hear¹ the lump that was removed from your cheek is not malignant and the only consequence of the operation will be a slight improvement in
your appearance. Aviva is dying to see your new dashing self!

I leave for Guelph one week from tomorrow. Though the Student's Council has left me to structure the Residency as I please I've decided to do there what worked out so successfully at Sir George Williams--give a course on the appreciation of poetry and conduct a workshop. Around this I'll build some other things, readings, informal symposia, etc, perhaps even try to get the Guelph burghers and their wives excited about poetry. My great ambition is to insinuate myself into the secondary school system and do something to revolutionize the teaching of literature. You chaps, it's quite clear, are never going to do anything about the idiocies that abound in it--because you're either unwilling or unable to or because, as I've suspected for a long time, you haven't a notion of what's wrong with it and where the remedy lies. Excuse this sudden excursion into polemics, but that's one subject among many others I feel very strongly about. I think it's becoming clear that only students protesting against the poor teaching they're subjected to, especially in the humanities, is likely to bring about any of the necessary reforms. I'd like to see the revolt spread to the high schools and from there go on to the primary schools and even reach into the kindergartens and nurseries. Can anyone in his senses call what those kids are ladled out--education? Why don't you and some of your colleagues, for a start, throw your full weight against lit exams in the primary and secondary schools? Against overworking the lit teachers and refusing to give them a special status which they ought to have, since their particular concern is nothing less than the "soul" of the pupil. Against archaic curricula which take no account of the greater sophistication and awareness which the kids today possess as compared with the more meagre equipment of the troglodytes who impose those curricula on them.

Since thinking on it makes me mad, I'll go on to more agreeable matters. My Selected Poems, with an "intro" by Wynne Francis,² will be out by the middle of next month. I'm hoping to have some advance copies before the old year expires. My Whole Bloody Bird³ is promised for publication by the middle of March. I read sections of the book to Leonard Cohen who thinks it's a real block-buster. I'm pleased with the book myself, since it's got a range and scope no other volume of mine can match. About its vitality, I haven't the slightest doubt because the Hellenic sun fairly flooded all its pores. I might go back to Molibos in May and see whether Apollo and the other Greek gods I worshipped this summer will again bestow their favours on me. I feel myself getting ready for a great impregnation.

I shall be at the library tomorrow and will pick up Can Lit with your review in it.⁴ I'm eager to read it. And, say, that's superb news--your being asked to lecture at Sligo.⁵ Heartfelt congrats, old man. I'm glad that others
are recognizing your great worth. There's no point in my adding "Keep it up"—because I know you will—or you'll think my remark obscene. Love & best wishes [to] you and Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

1Layton is apparently responding to a fugitive Pacey letter.


5Pacey was invited as Guest Lecturer at the Yeats International Summer School in Sligo, Ireland in 1969.

January 10, 1969
Dear Irving,

I haven't answered your letter of December 26, since I have been in a turmoil ever since it arrived—and still am in a turmoil. I have come to one of those fatal crossroads where I must make a choice that will probably determine the whole course of my remaining life.

Until December 23, my immediate & less immediate future looked delightfully definite—sabbatical leave in 1969-70 at Cambridge, a return to UNB in September 1970 as vice-president (academic) in succession to Alfie Bailey, who will retire in 1970. However, on Dec 23 Colin B. Mackay resigned as president, partly because of all the student & faculty unrest of last term, partly because of deteriorating health, partly because of general weariness & disillusionment after 15½ years in the hot seat of the presidential office.

Now an acting president is to be appointed almost immediately—a committee of selection has been at work since Xmas & is to make its recommendation before Jan 15—and very strong pressure is being put upon me to accept this post, on the grounds that I am the only member of the faculty who commands universal respect (this sounds as vain as hell but it is what the committee says, & what many members of the faculty have called me to say). The proposition is that I give up my sabbatical leave & act as president at least until June 1970—with the strong possibility of course that if I proved adept at the job I should be asked to carry on as permanent president.

How does one sort out one's motives in such a situation? My stock reply so far has been, "If I accept, it will be out of vanity, & I shall live to regret it." Then I think—yes, but if I make this "great refusal" aren't I being a coward, & refusing to tackle something that would be
a real challenge & which might force me to grow into a bigger, richer, more decisive person? I also think this—

You love the university, you want it to flourish, someone has to take on this rotten job, everybody says you are the only one who could do it—so aren’t you being selfish to say

"No thank you—I’m going to go off to Cambridge & retreat into my ivory tower & write books."

But on the other hand, you see what taking it would probably mean—no more books by Pacey, little leisure even for reading Canadian literature, no edition of Grove’s letters. And it might even kill me. The pressure on presidents these days—as witness the resignations at Victoria, SFU, UBC, Alberta, Waterloo, UNB—is almost unbearable. Students & professors are militant, revolutionary, scurrilous in their attacks on administrators. Could I take abuse, vilification, ridicule? I like to be liked, & am very vulnerable to adverse criticism.

Well, I suppose you are now at Guelph—but since I don’t have your address there I will send this letter to Somerled. I hope you are enjoying life at Guelph. Several of my friends are there—Herby Armstrong, the D of GS\(^1\), Bill Wein----?, the president (his last name eludes my memory), Murdo Mackinnon, the Dean of Wellington College\(^2\), etc.

If you can be helpful with advice re my dilemma, please write soon—any day now I shall formally confront the Great Decision.

As ever,
Des

1Herbert S. Armstrong (b. 1915), Professor of Geology at McMaster (1941-62); President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Calgary (1964-68); Dean of Graduate Studies at Guelph (1968-80).

2See 166.2.

592.[pc] January 10, 1969
Dear Desmond,

Haven’t heard from you and am anxious to get some news. How did the op go? I hope it wasn’t a cosmetic disaster but left your face more rugged and handsome than ever.

I talked to Eli Mandel last night and he said his face required a similar op. Maybe you’ve started something, and Frye, Wilson, MacLure and other critics will queue up for the removal of their moles—if that’s where their insights are lodged!

Bleakness framed by grey buildings—that’s the Univ of Guelph. But the coeds and cowbarns and myself whaling it in this huge fishbowl is a different experience from those I’ve had recently; so I surface and spout and then dive under the silence I make for myself to read Homer and Dante and Isaiah. I’m preparing myself for a successor to The Whole Bloody Bird—a long poem to make their shades glad.
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your postcard of Jan 10.

I wrote to you a week or so ago—and sent the letter to your Somerled Ave address since I didn’t have a Guelph address & wasn’t sure when you would be moving to Guelph. I hope my letter reaches you eventually—is Aviva in Montreal to forward mail to you, or is she with you in Guelph?

The operation left a very tiny scar beside my right ear—I can’t see it at all myself, & I gather most people don’t notice it. The stay in hospital was a bit of a lark actually—pretty nurses kept competing for the privilege of rubbing my back. I tried to persuade some of them to rub my front but they drew the line at that!

Your suggestion that all the Canadian critics will have their bumps removed is an intriguing one. Our criticism, bumpless, will become suave & conciliatory; our poets will be lauded with smooth praise, our magazines will suddenly become laudatory in their reviews, the Canadian Union of Poets will disband because they no longer have to take their lumps. And then critics could have lumps removed from appropriate portions of their anatomy—Pacey from the right cheek because he, as a devout Christian, was always "turning the other cheek"; Mandel from his neck because he was obsessed with hanging;1 Frye from his arse because he once attacked the frequency of buttocks in your poetry2 etc etc.

I am still being pressured to take on the presidency—the secretary of the committee of selection spent an hour in my office this morning trying to get me to commit myself, & saying that I have by far the greatest support from the Faculty & that I am "held in the highest esteem as both a scholar and an administrator" etc etc. But so far I am continuing to say no, unless they can prove to me that there is a clear & present danger to the university if I don’t take it. (I suspect that there are other deans who would quite like the job & would do it better than I could.)

I’ll try sending this direct to Guelph, & hope that it reaches you.

As ever,
Des

1The cover of Mandel’s Black and Secret Man (Toronto: Ryerson, 1964) features a hanged man.

2"One gets as tired of buttocks in Mr. Layton as of buttercups in the Canadian Poetry Magazine." Northrop Frye, "Letters in Canada: 1951 (Poetry)," University of Toronto Quarterly (April 1952): 255.
Dear Desmond,

When I saw Eli Mandel in Toronto this Saturday, he was wearing a brilliantly white bandage on the right side of his face and he managed to look both sheepish and proud at the same time. John Saywell was present to look me over as a possible recruit to the English dept at York University and so was his wife as an insurance against an over-hasty judgement. Women are much shrewder judges of character than men. Anyhow it seems I impressed them favourably—and also Michael Collie whom I met the following Monday morning—for I’ve just been informed that I’ve been taken on, either as Special Lecturer or professor, the title hasn’t been settled yet.

This means I’ll have to start looking around for a large house somewhere in the neighbourhood of the university since I’ll start teaching this September. They’re allowing me to write my own ticket, so I intend to give one course in "The Theory and Practice of Poetry" for advanced 3rd and 4th yr students and another in Creative Writing that will be open to all the talents on the campus. I’ll probably give several lectures on Modern Canadian Poetry as well, sharing the course with Eli. It all looks like fun, and the increase in earnings will let me do more for Betty and Naomi in San Francisco, and Max, who has his own share of worries just now in Montreal. Also for a couple of painters who suffer from the familiar affliction of talent without money.

If I told you about my schedule here you wouldn’t believe it. The university and the students’ council want to extract every ounce of good from their investment in this business of poet-in-residency. Also every bit of publicity. I don’t blame them in the least. Luckily for them they lighted on someone who has immense reserves of energy, likes meeting people, above all students, and is still thrilled by the sound of his voice. There are many residences on the campus and the students in them take turns inviting me over for poetry readings. Last night I was over at Simcoe Hall where about 35 girls from South Ontario listened to me reading the erotic poems of Ovid, Cohen, Layton, Cummings. At first their royal and loyal frostiness stiffened them against the raw emotions and the raw words, they were embarrassed because they didn’t know how they were expected to behave but after a while they relaxed their guards and let their smiles and juices run naturally over their upper and lower parts. When at the end I said I’d better stop reading or they wouldn’t be able to sleep at night, they all looked at one another with a knowing lasciviousness and broke into unrestrained laughter. In the meantime of course my hands had been stroking the hidden and delicious parts, squeezing them with an energy that only an imagination formed by erotic poetry and frustration can master. If anyone spent a sleepless night I think it was I.
I’m enclosing a page of the University paper to let you know that I also am having my "encounter" or in the lingo of the times—confrontation.
Write soon. Regards to Mary.

Best wishes,
Irving

1John Saywell (b. 1929), Professor of History at York University (1957—73); editor, Canadian Historical Review (1957—63); author of The Office of Lieutenant-Governor (1957) and Lord Minto’s Canadian Papers (1983).

2Michael Collie (b. 1929), Professor of English, York University (1965—90); Professor Emeritus (1990—present); author of Laforque (1964) and George Gissing: A Biography (1977).

3Layton was offered a tenured position as a full professor by York University in January 1969.

4B.A. Veldhuis, "Interview with Irving Layton," University of Guelph Ontarian 23 Jan. 1969:

February 12, 1969
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of January 23 & your phone call of last night. The delay in answering is attributable to sheer busy-ness—on top of all my other duties I am now chairman of the Senate Budget Committee and as such am charged with the task of scrutinizing all departmental budgets to see that the total balances with the total monies available. It doesn’t sound like the sort of job to give to a sensitive poetic soul like me, but I’m doing my best to become a hard-headed financial wizard.

About Toronto. I go up Tuesday next, Feb 18, & leave early Saturday afternoon the 22nd. During the days I shall be fairly busy—on Wednesday seeing three publishers (Ryerson, McClelland, U of T Press), on Thursday & Friday & Sat morning attending a conference on Canadian Studies sponsored by OISE at the Skyline Motel—but my nights are free (except for Tuesday night, when I am taking out a sexy former student of mine who now teaches at York). Any chance at all you could come into town for one of those evenings?—Wed, Thurs, or Fri?

Glad to hear about the job at York—as for your heavy schedule at Guelph I refuse to be sympathetic for I’m sure you’re working no harder than I am, & you’re obviously having more fun—at least you’re able to think about feminine juices released on to milk-white thighs whereas all I can think about are dollars & cents rather than trollops & cunts. My self-image ("old lecher with a love on every wind") now bears absolutely no relation to reality—I haven’t even had a good feel in months!

But—in odd moments—I’m getting together a really brilliant, ground-breaking public lecture for Sligo next August—an entirely new slant on "Among Schoolchildren"
which I’ll tell you about when we meet. I can see in my mind’s eye the Poet Laureate³ & Conor Cruise O’Brien⁴ sitting spell-bound at my feet as I pronounce my epoch-making words—then as the lecture ends all the celebrities & the hoi polloi rise to their feet & cheer me to the rooftops! All hail, Great Scholar! Critic Extraordinary! Heir to the True Mantle of Yeats! Hail!

Well, I must get to work—off to Ottawa first thing tomorrow morning for Canada Council meetings. Did I tell you that my son Peter’s poetry is improving & that he’s had three poems accepted by Fiddlehead⁵? The erstwhile rebel is now writing brilliant English essays & says he’s going to be a specialist in Can Lit like his old man. As he’s also captain of the rugby team he may yet grow up to be the all-round man of the Renaissance like his father before him.

Where’s Aviva? You never have told me whether she’s in Guelph or still in Montreal. I hope you & she are not having difficulties again. I shall be worrying till you tell me.

Love & kisses!

Des

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³Cecil Day-Lewis (1904-72), was named poet laureate in 1968.

⁴Conor Cruise O’Brien (pseud: Donat O’Donnell; b. 1917), Irish critic, dramatist, diplomat and professor, author of Parnell and his Party (1957) and To Katanga and Back: a UN Case (1962).


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596.[cc] [December, 1969]

We’re moving a couple of days after Xmas to:
34 Dufferin Rd,
Hampstead

When are you coming up to make use of our new (& old!) facilities?

Love from
Irving David Aviva

Dear Irving, & Aviva,

Thank you very much for your card & enclosed poem, which arrived today. The poem is a very powerful one.

I do hope very much that I may be able to see you & your new home soon. Several times, on my way through Montreal on to Ottawa for Canada Council meetings, I have phoned your number—but never with success. I go up next from February 4 to 6. If I knew you were going to be free then, I should be glad to stay over for a night in Montreal—that Friday evening, the 6th. Let me know what the situation is. I long to see you both again—was so disappointed not to see you in Ireland!

I won't bore you with the long & involved story of my life this year. As you probably know, I had hoped to be leading a leisurely sabbatical life in Cambridge—but was forced to cut my "rest" down to the months of August (Ireland) & September (Sweden & Germany, in search of Grove) & since October I have been absolutely swamped with work. I "glory" in the titles of Acting Vice-President (Academic) & Dean of Graduate Studies, & in addition I am chairman of the University Budget Committee—in other words, for the time being at any rate I have become a full-time administrator & in fact am forlornly trying to perform two full-time administrative jobs at once. Needless to say, all this has cut down on my sex life & virtually eliminated all the cozy comforts that make existence tolerable.

I was terribly thrilled to read my name in Irving’s list of "delights"—now if I could only make Aviva’s list of delights I’d be happy!

As ever,
Des

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1 In the summer of 1969, Layton travelled to Ireland and Portugal.

whole theme of the annual meeting is the effect of Canadian climate on Canadian life, & there will be papers on the economic, sociological, & technological effects as well.) Now I can of course write such a paper stressing the degree to which snow & hail & summer heat form the substance of so many of our best poems & fictions, and I can also speculate upon the psychological effects of our climate of extremes, etc. But I feel that it would be useful to hear from one or two of our best creative writers what they feel the effect of our climate upon them to have been. Is it true to say, as Frye says in the "Conclusion" of The Literary History of Canada, that "The writers of the last decade, at least, have begun to write in a world which is postCanadian... Sensibility is no longer dependent upon a specific environment..."? Personally, I doubt it. It must still be different to write in Canada than to write in New Zealand, say, where the temperature hardly ever drops below 55° or goes over 75°. What does it do to your sensibility to live in an environment like that of Canada?

Any ideas you can pass on will be most gratefully received & acknowledged.

As ever,
Des


2Northrop Frye, "Conclusion," Literary History of Canada (1965) 821-49. (Pacey quotes from 848.)

Dear Desmond,

Though yr letter is dated Jan 8th, I received it only a day or two ago. I wanted to sit down and answer it immediately, but things fell on my head like a slit crate of cans, and I'm still roller-coastering like mad on some of them. This isn't one job I've gotten myself into; it's a thousand. Or it's one but one whose many heads keep popping up and grinning fiendishly at me, like those of the fabled monster. Why didn't you tell me what a professor's life was really like? No, it's being poet--prof that's hurrying me prematurely into the land of grey-haired dodderers anxiously scanning the horizon for friends or strangers bearing obligations or commitments on their honeyed palates. The black signs on my calendar would make you weep—they're the hieroglyphics of my self-betrayal. I was going to say 'bondage' but self-betrayal sounds more dramatic!

Readings, readings, readings, And lectures, lectures, lectures. Promises to write prefaces, introductions, recommendations for grants, for scholarships, for acceptance...
into graduate schools. And MANUSCRIPTS! Everyone has been bitten by the mania for writing poetry. My desk has become the dumping-ground for all the bad poetry in this country with invisible chutes and conduits bringing me every verbalized twitch and nervous tic that ought to be shipped instead to the looney bins for safekeeping. Really I feel like the Sorcerer's Apprentice—how on earth can I stop the flood I seem to have started? Why don't the protesters and marchers call for a moratorium on poetry? For a start, why doesn't some benefactor of the human race shut down all the English departments and tell the profs and instructors to go off and fuck minnows—or something larger if they can manage it.

Do come and stay with us, Aviva and I wd like that very much. This time we can offer you a room all to yourself; it's the attic in our new house (34 Dufferin Rd, Hampstead) which I've made into a cozy monk's cell complete with a skull I picked up in Mithymna. You'll love it: I mean the cell, of course. Can you make it for the first week-end in February cause that's when I'm going to be in Montreal? I do hope you can. It'll be nice sitting in front of a good fire, swilling drinks and talking. It's been too long since we've done something like that.

What in the name of Jesus does Frye mean by a post-Canadian world? I didn't know this country was that important...Why not a post-Tunisian world or one that's post-Luxemburger? I'm just playing dense. Of course I know what he intends to say—it's just that he's expressed himself queerly. That's not what I want to take issue with, but with his notion that the environment is no longer a significant factor or constituent in creating the writer's sensibility. The trouble with Frye is that he's an ideologue, and seems unable to grasp the idea that poems are made from feelings, sensations, and moods—they're very concrete critters! If I look out of my window and see snow five months of the year, I'm obviously going to be a different sort of poet than if I were one living near a Mexican swamp or a Niçoise beach. My eyes are going to see different things, and my mind is going to form different images. My internal chemistry is going to be different, changing not only the colour of my urine but the colour of my saying. And what about the rhythms of one's living—they certainly were not the same for me in Tel Aviv and New Delhi or later when I moved on to Katmandu, and they're different again now that I'm in Toronto. Frye thinks there's a kind of international style that's developing in the Arts because of, among other things, the universalizing pressures of modern technology, commerce, science, etc. There is some truth in his observation, but only an ideologue who is unresponsive to the concrete nature of poetry—its rhythms, immediacy, and life-rootedness—wd or cd make the kind of abstraction out of the process that Frye does. To the living poet and novelist the universalization induced by modern technology and commerce is only One factor among many
others, and for some writers it may not seem an important one at all. I suspect there’s an authoritarian in Frye, a despot who has always delighted in laying down rules for the creator to follow—they must travel along the road he has indicated for them! The Marxian straitjacket is discarded for the Freudian one, and this, in turn, is scrapped for the newer, more all-inclusive one of ‘archetypes’, and now he has gotten hold of something he calls "The Modern Age". The disguises change but the despot underneath them doesn’t. However he makes his appearance, he always holds a club, or if you prefer, a slide-rule in his hand.

I’m enclosing a poem ("For Anna") I wrote several weeks ago. It wd take some subtle exploration to lay bare or describe the filaments linking it exclusively to the Canadian landscape, yet I believe I cd prove that the poem cd not have been written by anyone but a Canadian poet who has winter somehow stored in his marrow, winter being transmuted into the symbol—and more, the feeling, the very identity—of Death, or the withdrawal of life, of puritanism, timidity, human waste. For me a ride in the subway is different because I know it can deposit me at the edge of a forest. Concreteness is all. "Canadian clerks fingerling their wallets" or "smalltime racketeers remembering boyhood Xmases in Elmira"—well, for one thing, I couldn’t have thought about them, or NOT quite in the same way, if I weren’t a Canadian poet, or contrasted them so effectively with Anna (observe, I draw attention to her ‘foreignness’, postwar Hungarian). Indeed, the poem is a vivid reflection of my life as a Canadian, of someone who experiences so dramatically the winter and summer solstices. Geography, landscape, climate, culture—they’ve all played their part in the making of this poem—but in subtle yet concrete ways that no ideologue or mere theorist of poetry cd ever hope to apprehend.

Yrs,
Irving

enclosure: ts "For Anna"

1The Hydra; in Greek mythology, a serpent represented with numerous heads, slain by Hercules.

2See 172.7.


5"Men must endure/ their going hence, even as their coming hither: Ripeness is all." 5.2.8-9. William Shakespeare, King Lear.

6"For Anna," lines 24 and 4-5.
January 19, 1970

Dear Irving,

Thanks very much for your letter of January 15—both for the invitation to stay with you in Montreal the first weekend in February & for your interesting ideas about the effect of climate on Canadian literature.

I accept, with great pleasure, your invitation—I shall be arriving from Ottawa at 8:15 pm Friday evening Feb 6th, & I shall proceed straight to 34 Dufferin Road unless I hear from you to the contrary. I could stay over until Sunday the 8th (catching a plane for Fredericton about 3 o’clock in the afternoon) if you think you could put up with me that long. Alternatively, I could leave for Fredericton Saturday evening.

I accept your argument that climate (& environment) does affect the writer—but specifically how? For example, do the extremes to which the Canadian climate is subject, the terrific colds & hots, alter one’s conception of nature or of man? Is a Canadian likely to be less confident of man’s capacities, or more aware of Nature’s destructive power, than say, a New Zealander, living where nature almost always smiles? I suppose any such generalizations would strike you as the work of an ideologue—you are saying in effect (as the excellent poem you sent me also indicates) that it is in small specific details rather than large general ideas that the poet is affected by his environment, & I think I can agree with you.

Would it be true to say that almost all our most memorable poems & novels have reflected our climactic conditions very directly? I’m thinking of things like Lampman’s "Heat"1 & Grove’s "Snow"2 & your poem about Lake Achigan.3

Love,
Des

Love,
Des

1See 239.9.

2Frederick Philip Grove, "Snow," (chapter IV) Over Prairie Trails (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1922) 105-47.

3"First Snow, Lake Achigan," see 274.

March 17, 1970

Dear Desmond,

The rather pointless argument we had at the end might not have thrived as long as it did had I used the word 'institutionalization' instead of 'professors' and 'university'. I stubbornly cling to the notion that the poet is a free man who functions best when he’s able to cut his social obligations and commitments to a minimum. The strange device on his banner is not power but love. Respectability has never suited him. He makes a better
figure as madman, lunatic, clown, buffoon, or idol-smasher, and the university doesn't want such people—except, perhaps, as showpieces!

So I'm not as complacent as you appear to be about our younger poets drifting into the universities and taking on teaching jobs. The Bowerings, Daveys, Atwoods', etc ought to be out in the world getting that knowledge of the human heart—their talent taken for granted—from which can come the poems to stir the hearts of others. You're willfully blinding yourself if you think otherwise. Or it may be, as I largely suspect it is, that you haven't really given the subject much thought. And why should you?

Auden and Frost were in the universities? Sure. But only after they had firmly established their poetic identities, and you may take it for certain that they moved as freebooters through them. I really can't see them taking committee meetings, etc seriously. Can you? And can you really see D.H. Lawrence, Hart Crane, Dylan Thomas, Rilke, or D'Annunzio as university professors?

However, there are far more pressing subjects to argue about than this one. The truth of the matter is that anyone who's really an artist—that is, a free soul—will escape institutionalization, and only those who aren't allow themselves to get tamed. It was for this reason, and not out of nastiness or vanity, that I wanted you to get the record straight about myself. I'm not George Bowering or Tom Marshall, and if you can't see the difference you ought to get your head read.

But let me quote Pacey against Pacey. "I am more and more convinced that the memorable achievements in Canadian verse are those of the engaged realists, of Layton, Souster, Dudek, Purdy and Nowlan. (The Fiddlehead, Jan-Feb 1970). Putting aside the somewhat dubious instance of Dudek, four out of the five in this meritorious group are not academics; for of course for reasons which I've given you, I consider myself one of them. Another quote from that eminent and sensible critic, Pacey, and I'm done with this unedifying argument. "The rewards of being a poet in Canada today are so numerous and beguiling that there is a grave temptation to write poetry for the sake of the rewards rather than out of their agony or ecstasy of personal experience." (Essays in Canadian Criticism, p.220). That's well said. Isn't it possible, Desmond, that one of the chief rewards for writing the 'educated prose' which passes for poetry nowadays (agony? ecstasy? Hah!) is a university post?

I enjoyed seeing you and Mary, and all the other wonderful Paceys. Migod, what a clan. God bless you all.

Love,
Irving

enclosure: reprint "Aran Islands," Queen's Quarterly, 76.4 (winter 1969): 648-49. (For Desmond & Mary Much love, Irving.)
1Margaret Atwood (b. 1939), Canada's most well-known contemporary poet (The Circle Game 1966, Two—Headed Poems 1980), novelist (The Edible Woman 1969, Bodily Harm 1981) and essayist (Second Words: Selected Critical Prose 1982).


5Irving Layton, poetry reading, University of New Brunswick, 16 March 1970.

602. March 25, 1970

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of March 17, and for the offprint of Aran Island Poems. They catch the emptiness & sadness of that Irish landscape very well indeed. Don’t worry about our argument—I loved it. It was like old times to shout at one another about the pros & cons of the academic environment. We’re never going to agree on this one. I’m sure I’m right, & you’re sure you’re right. The logic of it all is so simple. Poet must live. Therefore he must a) live by his writing or b) live by some other job. If he chooses a), he has to become a commercial success, so he has to become a bad poet. If he chooses b), he can be either i) a manual labourer or ii) a clerk of some kind. If he chooses i) he’ll be brutalized, or so tired that he can’t write. If he chooses ii) he’ll have to suffer fools gladly whether he’s a clergyman, an insurance clerk, a bank manager, or a professor—but since professors on the whole are more humane than most clergymen & insurance clerks, his chances of remaining human are rather better.

The trouble with you is that you’re a bloody romantic who sees the poet as a sacred being who must not be besmirched by the secular world. And of course you’re also a good deal of a hypocrite, since you attack the groves of academe while sheltering in them yourself. In many ways you are the worst phony I know—and also the most lovable!

Did you see that snide review of Essays in Can Crit in the March Forum? Some shitless little graduate student of
Northrop Frye’s, I’ll bet.² Probably gets a hard-on once a year, & then is too nervous to jerk off.

It was great to have you here! What an audience! What a performance! I was exhilarated by the whole thing.

Come & see us again soon!

Love,

Des


²See 477.3.

603.

York University
April 1, 1970

Dear Desmond,

What in hell would I do without you? Some years ago you said I was "bluffing,"¹ and it started one of my better poems, "Icarus," which has recently been anthologized.² I also owe "Conference Man" to you,³ and my certainty that "This Machine Age" is a fine piece because you suggested that it was too trivial for inclusion in any book of mine.⁴ There are many other such debts I owe you, but I hope to repay them all by the masterpiece which your now calling me a "hypocrite" will undoubtedly call forth. Many thanks for your unfailing co-operation!

Me, a romantic? You must be nuts! Are you sure you’re not suffering from the effects of overwork? If I were a "romantic" I’d be shouting and ranting and chanting with the 'crazies' and 'revolutionaries', instead of taking the hardnosed position I do with regard to Vietnam and Israel. I believe I’ve the distinction of being the only "intellectual" in this country who doesn’t think the Americans were wrong in trying to keep South Vietnam (and by extension, Southeast Asia) out of the hands of the Communists. If there are any others, they haven’t been exactly eager to let people know where they stand. But then, my contempt for the Canadian intelligentsia, for their cowardice and obtuseness, is also on record—is also something about which I’ve left no one in doubt.

Several years ago when I returned from Germany and said flatly that there was no chance for a return of National Socialism, I was attacked and abused.⁵ Was there a single Canadian writer who came to my support, if only to plead for a fair hearing of my views? Not one! But what can one expect of lickspittles and toadies, of the tamed, toothless, and caged animals that abide in the universities? Nah, they’re not even that: they’re brainless conformists... chatterers. Even these epithets are wide of the mark, I fear. It’s simply that they’re unaware of what the real spiritual issues are, and where the significant battles are taking place. Someone like Milovan Djilas⁶ could tell them,
but not having either his depth or experience, how could these mumbling, toothless cripples understand him?

When you say I’ve sought shelter in the university, again you’re nuts, Desmond. At the time I was at Sir George Williams teaching evening classes (at $7 per hr) I was holding down five other teaching jobs. If you call that being ‘sheltered’ by the university, I can only conclude that you’ve finally cracked under the mental strain of being Vice-President of UNB or that your knowledge of the English language has lamentable gaps in it. Some sheltering! And I did that routine for something like 18 yrs. You try that some day—and bring out 2 volumes of poetry each year at the same time. No, Desmond, I love you like a brother, but I’ll be damned if I let you or anyone else rob me of my true glory—and it just ain’t that of being a sweet little academic: not NOW, NOT EVER.

I shan’t try to refute yr argument set up to prove that the country mouse is better off eating cheese and crackers in his secure rustic hole than the harassed city mouse. Not for nothing are you a writer of children’s verses! But the argument gives you away completely: your premise is security: mine is adventure and risk. Let’s leave it at that.

No, I haven’t seen the review in the CF—but certainly will. Yours is an excellent book, and your essay on Leonard Cohen (though I don’t altogether agree with you) the most perceptive of any I’ve read about his work. You’re a very rare person, and I admire you tremendously.

Love,
Irving

1See 477.3.


3See 511.

4See 460.1.


6Milovan Djilas (b. 1911), Yugoslav political writer and former communist leader who became one of Tito’s leading cabinet ministers in 1945 and one of the country’s Vice Presidents in 1953; forced to resign in 1954 for his criticism of communism, he was imprisoned in 1956 for an article supporting the Hungarian uprising; after his *The New Class* was published in 1957 he was imprisoned until 1961 and arrested the following year for the publication of his *Conversations with Stalin* (1962).
604. April 10, 1970

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your April Fool’s Day letter, which was most appropriately dated.

I am highly amused that you deny that you are a romantic & argue in rebuttal that you take a conservative line on Vietnam and Israel. You appear to be labouring under the illusion that all romantics are radicals. Surely you realize that there is a strong tradition of romantic conservatism, as well as one of romantic liberalism/radicalism, and that it includes such people as Walter Scott,1 Wagner2 & Roy Campbell3?

Perhaps I used the wrong word when I said that you had sought "shelter" in the university. But can you deny that you have benefitted from the presence in this country of universities & university professors? And if you have benefitted from them, why persist in attacking them?

You accuse me of seeking "security". If you think that my present job, where I am vulnerable to attack from all sides for basic decisions that I am called upon to make every day, is a secure one, you are nuts!

However, I enjoy our arguments & have no ill feelings. Quite seriously, I am dreadfully over-worked at the moment, & am getting no time at all for my Royal Society paper on climate & Can lit. If I had known what hellish pressures I should be under this year, I would never have agreed to give up my sabbatical leave. There are definitely times when I feel that I shall break down under all the pressure and when you refer to my having cracked under the strain you are dangerously near to the literal truth.

If you can write me an encouraging letter, I shall very much appreciate it. Right now I feel that I have no allies -- only hostile critics, most of whom I suppose are motivated by jealousy.

As ever,
Des

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1Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), Scottish novelist, poet and historian who regretted the loss of Scotland’s independence and cultural traditions via modernization.

2Richard Wagner (1813-83), influential German dramatic composer and theorist whose use of folklore and themes of German nationalism and social regeneration influenced the Nazis.

3Roy Campbell (1901-57), South African poet (The Flaming Terrapin 1924) who lived in Spain and supported Franco during the Spanish Civil War; his admiration for tradition and aristocracy is evident in early prose works like Taurine Provence (1932) and Broken Record (1934).

605. April 22, 1970

Dear Desmond,

You too? It’s enough to make a man pull out his hair in great handfuls, what in the name of oral contraception is ‘conservative’ about my line on Vietnam or Israel? Because I believe that S Vietnam should not be thrown to the
communist wolves but should remain independent, does that make me a conservative? What unholy nonsense! Or because I believe that Israel’s struggle to survive as a viable, democratic state is worthy of every free man’s support, and do wholeheartedly support it myself—does that make me a ‘conservative’? Since when is that the dividing line between ‘right’ and ‘left’, ‘conservative’ and ‘radical’? This sort of polarization is something dreamed up by communists and their silly fellow-travellers, and accepted unthinkingly by professorial ninnies like yourself for whom politics is much too recondite a subject for comprehension. I’m no Roy Campbell, you silly nut. Have you ever read the poems I wrote when I was in Spain, particularly "El Gusano"¹ and "El Caudillo"²? Obviously you have not. Wagner, besides being a confused thinker, was an anti-Semite whose reactionary outlook I’ve also found repellent. I’m too much of a Nietzschean to ever go along with Wagner, but that won’t mean much to you since you’ve probably never read "Nietzsche Contra Wagner"³—a brilliant polemic by my beloved Friedrich. Scott’s conservatism is forgiveable, a romantic blending of nostalgia and Highland chivalry. Its political content is nil.

I don’t attack universities or university professors. I attack academia and academic poets. Why do you persist in refusing to acknowledge the distinction I’ve always made between these two classes? Don’t you ever read anything I write? My "preface" to Periods Of The Moon (final paragraph)⁴ distinguishes them about as clearly as it can be done, anyway as clearly as I can do it.

To change the subject: contributions are pouring in for the "Canadian Poet’s Award"; there should be at least $1,000 to give Milton Acorn.⁵ So far, no one has told me that the GG Award went to the right man. Even F.R. Scott, I’ve just been told, is willing to make a public statement that Acorn, rather than Bowering, ought to have received it. That’s great news.

Why aren’t you on the committee? That place is yours, if it belongs to anyone. Your reviews in recent years have been first-rate in their sensitivity, critical acumen, and passion. And so beautifully written too. I mean every word of this.

Yrs,
Irving

¹Irving Layton, "El Gusano," The Laughing Rooster 107-08.

²Layton, "El Caudillo," The Laughing Rooster 29.


When Milton Acorn’s volume I’ve Tasted My Blood: Poems 1956-1968 failed to win the Governor-General’s Award, his fellow poets created the Canadian Poetry Award and named him “The People’s Poet.” The presentation was made May 16, 1970, at Grossman’s Tavern in Toronto.

606. May 11, 1970
Dear Irving,

Thank you for your vituperative and illogical letter of April 22. Your apoplectic prose was so indigestible that I didn’t have the stomach to answer it before now. Of course it’s conservative, indeed reactionary, to think in terms of protecting south Vietnam from Communism and tiny Israel from the big bad wolves of Arabism in the year 1970 (I almost said 1870, because that’s about the appropriate date for your political attitudes!). Do I need to argue with you further or have the events of the last few days finally persuaded you of the error of your ways? Do you still support Richard Nixon & American imperialism now that he & it have transgressed the neutrality of Cambodia¹ (it too must be saved?) & his military minions have gunned down fourteen students on the campus of Kent State²? If so, when in God’s name are you going to realize that events have passed you by while you stood in a frozen posture? Is it your ambition to be the last man on earth to wave the Stars & Stripes?

When Israel was being established³ I was all for it—and still am. But let’s not kid ourselves any longer that it’s a meek little lamb on the international stage. It’s the only real military power in the Middle East & it’s time it exercised a little charity towards its neighbours. I quite agree that Israel must maintain her defences, but I don’t think she should shake her fist so much.

As for Wagner’s anti-semitism, I didn’t for a moment suggest you resembled him in all respects (after all, do you write operas?) but that you resembled him in being a romantic reactionary. And it’s very interesting that you are so convinced that Scott had “no political content”—I suggest you re-read the Waverley novels, or his letters, or if that’s too much to ask, the latest study of him.

So you make subtle distinctions between professors per se & professors per poets, do you? Where? Do you attack Frye because he once wrote a poem in Acta Victoriana⁴ & Daniells only because he versified his way Deeper into the Forest⁵? Is it George Whalley’s verse that gets under your skin or his fake English accent?⁶

In the final paragraph of the "preface" to Periods of the Moon you do grudgingly concede that some scholars & critics are on the side of the angels (poets) but you almost spoil the gesture by denying them the right to talk of "technique" or "aesthetic" or "constitutive symbol"—which surely is their proper stock-in-trade? I see that beside that passage I’ve written in the margin of my copy "but cf Coleridge"—who was about the most theoretical critic of them all, & a poet to boot!
I’m glad to hear that your fellow-poets are inundating you with gifts for Milton Acorn. Don’t you seriously think that it would be better to give up the GG’s Awards altogether, & to abandon the fraud that it is possible to measure books one against the other? I suppose the awards stir up a bit of interest among the general public, but they also stir up much antagonism & much real frustration.

I was on the committee for some years--back in the fifties'--but I never liked the exercise & I’m not especially anxious to renew it.

Would be interested to know what you think of my new story in the May issue of the Atlantic Advocate. I think it is a minor masterpiece, but I just might be prejudiced.

Give my love to Aviva baby when you see her!

Love & kisses,
Des

1. In April 1970, President Richard Nixon ordered US and South Vietnamese troops to invade Cambodia to clear out military supply centres that North Vietnam had set up there, thereby widening the war.

2. On May 4, 1970, National Guard units fired into a group of anti-Vietnam War demonstrators at Kent State University in Ohio, killing four students and wounding nine others.

3. The state of Israel was proclaimed in Tel Aviv by the Jewish National Council on 14 May 1948, upon the termination of the twenty-eight year British mandate for Palestine.

4. I have been unable to locate a poem by Northrop Frye in Acta Victoriana, and Frye bibliographies do not list any such publication, although they do list several "fables" Frye submitted under an alias; however, as Pacey was the editor of Acta Victoriana 1936-38, Frye may have submitted a poem under an alias as well.

5. Roy Daniells, Deeper into the Forest (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1948).

6. Daniells and Whalley were both known primarily as scholars, professors and critics although they each published two volumes of verse.

7. Pacey served on the Governor General’s Award Board 1953-55.


[s.c.]: ts "You and the Twentieth Century", "Black Panthers", and "For My Student Militants" Nail Polish 29, unpublished, published as "For Some of My Student Militants," Nail Polish 46-47.

Dear Desmond,

Your bombast, though more extravagant, doesn't cover up your failure to answer the simple & direct question I put to you: does one's position on the Vietnamese war determine whether he's a reactionary or not. I do note that you say: "Of course it's conservative, indeed reactionary, to think in terms of protecting South Vietnam from communism and tiny Israel from the big bad wolves of Arabism..." But even if that statement were true, which of course it isn't, having only your vehement iteration behind it, surely that by itself doesn't make one into a total reactionary, which all along I thought was the label you were trying to pin on me when you compared me to Wagner and Roy Campbell. For your filing cabinet and peace of mind, I support the NDP on most issues, and if you were to list "progressive causes", ie medicare, free psychiatric care for overworked English profs, abolition of capital punishment, sex in our penal institutions, etc, you'd have to put me down on the right side--no the left, to use your quaint terminology.

When you go on as you do abt "Nixon and American imperialism", you make me realize how old I am, something that very few can do, and how difficult it must be for some people to shake off the verbal habits of their youth. I shan't waste my time discussing the Vietnam war with you, since it's obvious that the best you can do is mouth the current cliches given to you by the mass media overwhelmingly staffed by 'leftwingers' and overwhelmingly hostile to Nixon. Of course, as a poet by vocation and a political scientist by training, I'm able to cut through the mental and moral fog that envelops somebody like yourself who probably hasn't had an original idea about politics since his freshman year in the university. Nor will I argue with you about Israel, since you haven't the faintest notion of what it's all about. I'll only ask you to read my poem "After Auschwitz".¹ It was written with people like you in mind--good, liberal-minded souls, who want "fair play" between 2 million Israelis and 150,000,000 Arabs supported in every way, short of actual deposition of troops (though that's probably coming), by the Soviet Union. I can imagine your comments at the time of the Warsaw ghetto uprising...For gawd's sake, read Theodore Draper's Israel and World Politics.² It might just possibly, though I'm not hopeful, save you from putting down on paper such crass idiocy as "I don't think (Israel) should shake her fist so much."

The poets are not the only angels--all creators are. I thought my passage in Periods of the Moon made that quite clear. That you're unable to follow an argument or are tricky and evasive in answering one, doesn't worry me too much, but that you apparently have some difficulty in apprehending the meaning of words--well, that does. Have you had your eyes tested recently? My praise for scholars,
etc is not at all grudging, since I think we are all labouring in the same vineyard. The creative person is different from the scholar and the critic because he deals with life and reality at first hand; he’s the fellow who gets the first taste of the grape; the others must stand around while he smacks his lips or, alternately, spits the mess out with a curse or a moan. But I don’t want to repeat what I said in my "preface" to The Laughing Rooster, where I deal with just that point as well as some others connected with the creative process.\(^3\) Though now that I’ve been made aware that you can’t read well, there’s no sense in telling you to look at it again. Hell, you might come back at me with something even more egregious than your explosion over Coleridge being "the most theoretical critic of them all, and a poet to boot". My, my, that’s what happens to someone who lives in a backwater town where on cold, clear nights one can hear the bears fart. What I mean is that, your brain must have gone to sleep (when not awakened by the farting bears) or you’d have realized that the important consideration is that Coleridge’s theory is rooted in his practice as a poet, he knows the creative process at first hand, unlike other critics who, like Northrop Frye, can only babble about something they know only from hearsay.

However, all this is old stuff. Still, it bothers me that after all these years you should think I’m against critics and scholars when I’m certainly nothing of the kind, or against professors when it’s pedants that I’m against, the undertakers and morgue attendants of literature.

Yes, we collected over one thousand dollars for Acorn, his own province kicking in with two hundred. The presentation is being made tomorrow night at Grossman’s tavern, Milton’s favorite hangout when he’s in Toronto. Eli Mandel tells me the CBC is going to cover it, as is most of the local press. We’re going to present him with a silver-plated medal along with the cheque for $1,000, and Eli will read a brief citation that he and I concocted together. I guess most of the young poets and sensitive longhairs will be attending. It ought to be, as they say, a memorable occasion.

I’m winding things up, and will be leaving for Montreal this Sunday. Aviva is arriving on Saturday for the Milton Acorn thing, and so we’ll be driving back together. Seymour Mayne\(^4\) and his current amour will probably be coming along with us. My plans for the summer are still vague. I’d like to go some place where the sun is strong and dependable, but it doesn’t seem fair to leave Aviva and David for the summer months, after I’ve been separated from them all these months. What I most want this summer is sunshine and peace and quiet, so that I can finish my book of poems\(^5\) in time to hand it in to McStew for publication next January. I hope you rec’d the hot poems I mailed you during the week. They’re in the book. I saw the Marx Bros last night in At the Opera\(^6\) and At the Races\(^7\) and never laughed so much in all my life. They’re great! Real geniuses. Mayne and I
are going again tonight to see another double feature of the Marx Bros...I hope things have eased up for you. Love to Mary.

Hugs & handshakes,
Irving

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1Irving Layton, "After Auschwitz," The Whole Bloody Bird 149.
3"Nurtured by sterile academies in their comfortable nests, should this notion that the poet is the servant of Culture and Education gain adherents in and out of the universities you can kiss poetry a fond good-bye." Irving Layton, "Preface," The Laughing Rooster 17-25.
4Seymour Mayne (b. 1944), poet, critic, editor, Professor of English at the University of Ottawa; author of For Stems of Light (1971) and Name (1975); editor of Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics (1978).
5Irving Layton, Nail Polish (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971).
6A Night at the Opera, dir. Sam Wood, Bellevue/MGM, 1935.
7A Day at the Races, dir. Sam Wood, Bellevue/MGM, 1937.

608. May 27, 1970

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of May 15.

You insist on my answering a "simple & direct question"—does one's position on the Vietnam war determine whether he's a reactionary or not? Of course the question is not at all simple, since it involves the meaning of a word. Now I accept Wittgenstein's dictum that there is no "ideal" or "abstract" or "real" meaning of a word, but that rather "the meaning of a word is the use that is made of it."¹ Now when we use the word "reactionary" today we mean someone who clings to notions, beliefs, attitudes etc which may once have been valid but are valid no longer. As I see it, the only persons who support the Vietnamese war are those who cling to antiquated notions. They may, for example, see the world as formed of two power blocs, the nice Americans & their allies on the one hand, & the nasty Russians & their allies on the other. But of course that doesn't work at all any more, since the communists are not a single bloc, & the Russians & the Americans are probably nearer to being allies than the Russians & the Chinese.

The Vietnamese war is indefensible from any rational point of view. Even if one accepted that the best thing for the world would be a strong America which could hold the communists at bay—even so the war is bad. Its military effect is to weaken the USA, & its political effect is to divide the USA & bring it to the verge of civil war.
Why be so foolish as to cling to your prejudices when they are clearly indefensible? Why not cultivate humility & publicly repent? Write a poem called "Mea Culpa"!

You are equally insensitive on the matter of literary criticism. The critic and the creator are not rivals, nor are they arranged in some sort of hierarchy—the creator tasting the grape & the critic tasting the taster, as you suggest. As human beings, both taste the grape, and as human beings both have unusual sensitivity & intelligence which leads them to wish not merely to experience but also to express their experience, to reflect upon sensations.

Some people, like Coleridge, have a roughly equal share of what for the sake of convenience (for of course they can’t really be separated) we can label "imagination" and "intelligence", and such people are both creative artists & critics; other people, like yourself & Byron, have imagination to burn but are like children when they try to think; other people, like Aristotle (& me!), have little imagination but a hard, clear, fine intelligence which enables them to order the world & see order in literature & elsewhere. What you should be attacking is mediocrity in all places—a mediocre poet is as bad as a mediocre critic, but a good critic is just as valuable as a good poet.

I leave for Ottawa tomorrow morning, for three days of Canada Council meetings, & then go on to Winnipeg Saturday night where for the next week I shall be attending the annual meeting of the Royal Society of Canada. On Monday June 1 I face the ordeal of reading an hour-long paper on "Climate and Canadian Literature", in which I quote you on several occasions.

Mary & I go to England for a five week holiday, July 12 to August 16, & we are hoping to tour Cornwall & Wales. We shall probably look up Norman Levine in St Ives. Love to Aviva & yourself & David.

Des


2Pacey’s visit to Norman Levine in Cornwall became the subject of his article "Where Will Norman Go Next?" Atlantic Advocate (May 1971): 59-63.

June 21, 1970

Dear Desmond,

Thank you for your letter which though dated May 27th only reached me a few days ago. I was delighted by its reasonableness, and my hopes for your continued development soared, despite the fact that you misspelled the name of your authority. His name is written with a "g", not a "k".

I see you’ve skipped away from the Cambodian invasion, because by now it must be clear to even yourself that Nixon’s move was both strategically sound and necessary, and may very possibly bring the Indo-Chinese war to a sudden and
dramatic end. It wouldn’t astonish me, though it might
astonish the bag of conventional leftists and peacemongers
that have been prognosticating disaster for the United
States for so long it might give them nervous breakdowns
when peace finally does come. I hope it does, because I
have no patience with fools.

It’s difficult to carry on an argument with you because
your thinking is ‘chunky’ and you insist on imposing that
‘chunkiness’ on your adversary. I’ll say nothing about the
way you stretch the word ‘reactionary’ so that it’s made to
cover, quite illogically and illegitimately, all my
political stances—something I’ve been trying unsuccessfully
to dissuade you from doing—but will content myself with
pointing out that I’ve never had the notion of a monolithic
communism you foist on me. There’s an example of your
chunky thinking. I don’t see the fighting in Vietnam and
the Middle East as a struggle between ‘communism’ and
‘capitalism’, but one between the Soviet Union and the
United States. Ideology has very little to do with the
matter. For good and sufficient reasons, I want to see the
United States come out on top in this struggle: certainly if
she does smaller countries like South Vietnam, Cambodia,
Laos, Israel, etc will have a chance of surviving as free
and independent entities.

My choice is clear. I prefer S Vietnam to N Vietnam; S
Korea to N Korea; West Germany to East Germany; Taiwan to
Red China; Israel to Czechoslovakia. We owe it entirely to
American strength and/or sacrifice that the first column
exists, plus the fact that without American resolution both
Japan and Indonesia would have inevitably slid into the
"communist" orbit. If people like yourself want to bemuse
yourselves with high-sounding moralistic catchwords, that’s
your affair.

You’re often irritated with me because I criticize
‘profs’ and pedants. But I do so because unlike that breed
I have—every first-rate artist does—a highly developed
sense of reality. What is the compliment Coleridge pays
Shakespeare? That his \textit{judgement} was commensurate with his
\textit{genius}. I hope one day the same will be said of me.
Believe me, Desmond, it’s in the stars that I should have
applauded Nixon’s bold decision to send Am troops into
Cambodia while you and Eayrs and ten thousand lib-lab
leftwing, peacemongering, cliche-ridden, nerveless, gutless
pietistic and romanticizing ‘intellectuals’ should have
tried to stomp him to death with your crutches. It’s in the
stars, Desmond, it’s in the stars.

Ugh, what a breed!

The defeat of Wilson and his cohorts\footnote{4} is a sign that
things are changing, that people are fed up with "stomach
socialism." Young people everywhere--note what’s happening
in Sweden--are turning away from the humanitarian,
eggalitarian nonsense preached by a brainless vestigial
Christianism, and are demanding heroism, glory, and rank
based on ability. I hope and pray that this noble impulse
will find or create charismatic democratic leaders capable of translating them into action and deed. We have entered a post-industrial world where people with ideas like your own are rapidly beginning to take on the charming qualities of a 16th Cent. kitchen utensil.

I know it's useless telling you these things, just as it was useless telling you years ago that Klein's radical defect was his lacking a 'sense of evil'. Your chunkiness prevented you from assimilating and making good use of this observation. Now Tom Marshall has edited the various critical pieces written over the years on Klein, and pays me the deserved compliment of saying that I had put my finger on his major limitation as a writer.

But that too, Desmond, was in the stars.

Love,
Irving

Love to Mary, warmest regards to Peter. I greatly enjoyed his visit.  


1Misdated June 1.
2Pacey had spelled Wittgenstein Wittkenstein.
4The Labour Party of Harold Wilson was defeated in the British general election on June 18 by the Conservative Party; the 1970 general election was the first in which young people between the ages of 18 and 21 voted.
"Stomach socialism" is Layton's term for modern welfare or consumer socialism: socialism for the belly.
5See 230.11.

7Marshall notes Layton's insight into Klein's work:
In his review of Poems (1944) Irving Layton pinpoints Klein's major weakness when he suggests that the "deeper note," the full nature of man's (ie one's own) incorrigible nature is usually lacking in Klein's questioning of the Deity. xiii

8Peter Pacey was visiting the home of his friend Rick Adams in Montreal.
Dear Oiving,

Thank you for your letter, received June 25 but obviously mis-dated June 1 (I say obviously since you mention Harold Wilson's defeat at the polls.) So if I misspelled somebody's name, you mis-date your letters, oh superior one!

With your usual careless abandon you have now picked up an entirely new club from your varied arsenal and are beating me with the word "chunkiness." Now there is a wonderful example of the pot calling the kettle black! You, my dear sir, are the supreme living example of chunkiness of thought, since in your romantic reactionary way you divide the world into great abstract entities: the United States and Soviet Union, the good nations & the bad nations, the small states and the big states etc. You are the one who creates a mysterious group of "left-wing lib-lab intellectuals" which makes me a bedfellow of James Eayrs¹ & a host of other individuals with whom I have virtually nothing in common.

To be semi-serious for a change, I realize that I am ineffective politically but it is not because I belong to any group or take any party's line but quite the reverse--because I can never fully accept any group approach or follow any party line. I am the uncommitted man, and although I know that non-commitment leaves you without political power I choose to go down with my individualistic colours flying. For example, I have always believed that the Jews should have a national home in Israel, & I feel that the Arabs are mad not to recognize this fact. On the other hand, I disapprove of the belligerent activities of the present Israeli gov't, even though I see the provocations to which they are subjected. Similarly, as my New Romans article indicated², I have always admired certain elements in the American tradition, but I feel just as sure that I am right in condemning their activities in Vietnam & Cambodia as you feel sure that you are right in endorsing them.

Quite apart from our differences of view, & speaking now in full seriousness, I feel that we are basically different in our responses to the world about us. (I am not now making any value judgments, & would be quite prepared to concede that your responses are much more important and influential & penetrating than mine.) I am really not very interested in politics on a global, national or even regional scale, and don't profess to be an expert on them. I think I do respond very sensitively to the people with whom I am in close contact, & that my political skills (& I do have some) are effective in my immediate area. Since I am able to look relatively impartially at issues, I can mediate between rival views in the university, produce a consensus from an apparently deadlocked committee, create an air of goodwill out of an atmosphere of suspicion etc.
Which leads me to say something of the curious situation in which I have found myself this year. As you know, I think, I was begged to give up my sabbatical in order to take on the job of Vice-President (Academic). However, because of the "participatory democracy" now in vogue in academic circles, I was appointed only as the Acting Vice-President, & the post was advertised as vacant all over the bloody world. Scores of applications came in, & eventually the candidates were reduced to a short list of four, myself included as the only internal candidate. The three external candidates were brought to the campus, met all the faculties etc--& quite recently the list was further reduced to two, myself & one external candidate. He was brought back for a further round of interviews, I was required to appear as a candidate before the various faculties, & now all members of faculty are being invited to submit their views on the two of us. The final meeting of the Selection Committee will be held on July 10, & a recommendation will then be made to the Board of Governors. On July 12 Mary & I are going to England for a month's holiday--so I shall either be going in triumph or in defeat!

Now I agree in principle with these democratic procedures but in practice I have found the whole process extremely hard on the nerves. To be an acting vice-president is very difficult, since you cannot make long-term plans & are not at all sure how far your authority extends. Also, I have had to carry on my usual job as Dean of Graduate Studies on top of my (possibly) temporary duties as vice-president, & this has meant carrying an almost impossible load of work.

Well--enough of my troubles. I am glad you enjoyed Peter's visit. Do give my love to Aviva. I hope I may see you both before too long--possibly in September?

As ever,
Des

1James Bayrs (b. 1926), Canadian journalist, broadcaster, editor and Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto (1951-91); frequent contributor to the Canadian Forum and Saturday Night, the author of In Defence of Canada (1967) and Diplomacy and its Discontents (1971).

2As a Canadian professor I am envious of the great libraries and other academic resources of the leading American universities...As a private person with strong literary interests I have nothing but admiration for American literature...All of which brings me to my main point—that the redeeming feature of Americans is their capacity for self-criticism.


3John Anderson; see 670.2.
Dear Desmond,

Thanks for your vast patience and good humour.

I suppose I must take you at your own word when you say the real difference between us is that I'm a very committed man and you aren't. You take pride in your "objectivity," your 'impartiality', and appear to be more than a little smug that your cool reasonableness allows you to say (intone?) "...on the one hand there's...but on the other." To any man of passion and concern, there's something almost fixed and mechanical about such a posture, and makes me think of the STOP GO signs at unimportant railway crossings, the wooden bars shooting up and down as required.

But of course your 'objectivity' is really only pretense and im-posture. Because when the chips are down you're taking sides (anti-American on the Vietnam issue; anti-Israel on the issue of its present strategy). Since these ARE the vital issues--what sensible person doesn't 'admire certain elements in the American tradition', or believe that 'Jews should have a national home'?--and your position on both of these is the conventional lib-lab one, why do you paint a picture of yourself as an Olympian deity floating above the battle? For me the issue is not Vietnam, but the fate of Southeast Asia, and ultimately of the free world. I cannot, like yourself and others, close my eyes to the nature of communist tyranny, they were opened long before the enslavement of Czechoslovakia--or pretend the Russians aren't probing for advantage and power in the Middle East and Latin America. Just as firmly as in the 30s when the danger to the human spirit took the shape of National Socialism, so today I'll fight the mental fight against the present enemies of the open society. What free man doesn't rejoice that South Vietnam hasn't fallen into the grip of the N Vietnamese communists, and that its recently held elections were meaningful, fair, and democratic? You would have given them over, all twenty or twenty-two million of them to be trussed up by the communist thugs who rule in N Vietnam--without a free press, a constitution, or the right to assembly.

And you have the indecent gall to call me a reactionary!

Alas, Desmond, as a poet I've watched the deterioration of language, so I'm not too astonished to find you one of the many sad victims of our present-day masscult. But it does sadden me. It's a sign of the times that someone as acute and sensitive as yourself can be made to repeat the current puerilities, and that commonsense, realism, and decency have such a hard time of it. When I re-read the diatribes against Nixon because he did the sensible thing of flushing the communists out of their Cambodian sanctuaries, I begin to despair for the future of the free world, and begin to think that Spengler may have been right after all.
Bourgeois—christendom is so racked with guilt, so paralyzed by moral confusion, so blinded by the false glow of its culture, that it seems hardly a match for the Russian and Chinese totalitarians who are its sworn enemies. Did I mention Spengler? Hitler may yet turn out to be the greatest prophet of this century and the future. Hitler, with his contempt for the flabby democracies, with its Chamberlains, Daladiers and lib-lab intellectuals.

However, I think Nixon is going to hold firm. And despite the sneers and jeers of the intellectual community—the Galbraiths, Schlesingers, etc—when all the smoke has cleared, South Vietnam will be free, independent, and democratic. And so will the other small countries in SE Asia. Which is what the war was all about! Remember? And therefore, what you are really saying, with all your fine talk about objectivity, is that it doesn’t concern you one way or the other. For you there’s no difference between the Soviet Union and the United States, totalitarian and open societies—to quote your own words, they are ‘abstract entities’. Or rather, to be fair to you, because I insist on drawing distinctions and voicing preferences, you label me a ‘romantic reactionary’! I’m ready to have the argument next time, since this is where it has apparently led. As a poet I can not, and will not, blind myself to the knowledge that the spirit expresses itself in socio-economic forms. I read its chart and tick off South Vietnam, Israel, Czechoslovakia...You don’t, and that’s the true difference between us, between critic and creator. What a poor, sorry thing ‘reasonableness’ is when put against intuition.

(How’s that for a thunderous peroration!)

I’m enclosing three new poems to dispel the thick political fog I’ve wrapped myself in and to show you that my more sensitive and merry sides haven’t completely faded away. I must be immersed in politics because that’s the contemporary expression of the human spirit. Any writer today who doesn’t is merely a babbling neurotic or merely an entertainer....Tam Rev has six poems, and Quarry, four. All new, and all I think, very good. My most recent poem is titled "Dionysius in Hampstead", but it’s too long to type. It’s a poem that will blow your mind. I hope the postal situation doesn’t prevent this from reaching you before you take off for Europe. I hope you go in triumph, and you and Mary have a great holiday.

Peace and love,
Irving


1Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia on August 20, 1968; a treaty of "friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance" between the two nations was signed in Prague on March 20, 1970 and ratified on June 1st.
I have been unable to locate any records of recent elections in South Vietnam.


Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940), British prime minister 1937-40 whose name is identified with the policy of "appeasement" toward Hitler's Germany in the period immediately preceding World War II, especially in the Munich Agreement of September 30, 1938, in which he and Premier Edouard Daladier of France granted almost all of Hitler's demands and left Czechoslovakia defenceless.

Edouard Daladier (1884-1970), French politician who as premier signed the Munich Pact, an agreement that enabled Nazi Germany to take the Sudetenland (a region of Czechoslovakia) without fear of opposition from either Britain or France.

See enclosure.


Layton, "Dionysius in Hampstead," *Nail Polish* 87.

*Nail Polish* 11, 72, 12.

[s.c.](July 6, 1970): ts "Dionysius in Hampstead"

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612. President's Office
UNB
July 10, 1970

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of July 5, the enclosed poems, and "Dionysius in Hampstead" which arrived the next day. Keep up your letters, but excuse me if I don't write a long reply. This letter is to let you know that a week ago today the roof fell in on me. Our new president, my close friend Jim Dineen, went into hospital for tests two weeks ago this Sunday. A week ago today they operated on him for a kidney tumour--& found that he has terminal cancer which has spread so badly that there's virtually no hope. So--here I am Acting President, Acting Vice-President, & Dean of Graduate Studies. The Board of Governors is to have an emergency meeting next Thursday & expectations are that I will be confirmed as permanent Vice-President & named as Acting President until such time as Jim is able to resume or decides to resign or dies. It's a grim prospect in any case--once again I am reminded of those brilliantly perceptive lines by T.S. Eliot in "Gerontion"--

Think now

History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors, and issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities. Think now
She gives when our attention is distracted
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving...

But I also try to comfort myself with the words of E.M. Forster, who said he wanted to develop "an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky." When I am tempted to dodge the frightening responsibilities that have now so unexpectedly fallen on me, I think of that word "plucky" & try to live up to it.

Needless to say, I have had to cancel my British holiday--though I may get over for a brief period in August.

Hugs,
Des

1James Dineen, Professor of Electrical Engineering at the University of New Brunswick from 1942; acting President 1969-70; President 1970-72.


3"I believe in aristocracy, though--if that's the right word, and if a democrat may use it. Not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky." (73)

613. 35 Stratford Rd.,
Hampstead, Que.
July 28, 1970

Dear Desmond,

In the middle of an unrelenting heat wave, and trying to get our new home in order. Here we stay! Two movings in six months is quite enough, thank you, tho' this second one didn't frazzle and exasperate me as much as the first one which took place during a fine old Montreal midwinter snowstorm. We're all but settled in now, and the house is comfortable and lovely enough to make [us] forget the stresses and strains of shifting residence during a July sweltering. One of its great features is a very large plot enclosed on all sides by hedges with an apple tree smack in the middle of it. It's a place where I can dream and write, with no prying neighbours to watch me unless they stand on their chairs to do so. The first fruit has been a poem which I've titled--rather suggestively--"End of the White Mouse". It's one of the best things I've done in a long time, to be put beside "The Bull Calf" though its metaphysical and social implications are much broader and deeper. I've sent it off to the QQ and I hope they take it. For their own good repute they had better!

Robert Weaver sent me a delighted note, praising and accepting "Dionysius in Hampstead" and "The Haunting". I know they're both fine poems, but it's always a nice feeling
to have one’s own appraisal confirmed. I was nervous that he mightn’t see the new things—for me, that is—that I was trying to do technically, but I see I needn’t have worried. *Tam Review* has now six poems of mine, and they should all be in the next issue if Weaver decides to add these latest two to the four he accepted earlier. *Quarry* has another batch of poems; Tom Marshall says he likes them all but he’s asked someone else to edit the next issue(s), so I’ve not heard the last say about them.

I’ve all but decided to call my new book *The Clumsy Angel* preferring it to the two others I’ve been juggling in my mind: *Dionysius in Hampstead* and *That Angelic Ladder*. What’s your preference? The more wicked I grow, the more obsessed I become with Angels!

The war in Vietnam is all but over—no news of any fighting in S Vietnam for some time now—and Nasser and the Jordanians seem genuinely interested in a middle East settlement. It won’t surprise me if there’s a sudden outbreak of peace all over the world. If it happens, I’ll know whom to thank; it won’t be the funky lib-lab intellectuals! Thank god there are still some people left with guts and pride in them. And a sense of reality... what’s the news about your friend? If prayers can help him, he has mine. And so have you, and my regrets for your spoiled transatlantic plans.

Love,
Irving

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2 See 3.3.


4 Robert Weaver, letter to Irving Layton, 14 July 1970, Layton Collection, Concordia University Library.

5 Layton’s next volume was titled *Nail Polish*.

6 The two-month US military operation in Cambodia (see 607) was completed by June 30; on that date Nixon issued a detailed report on the operation, guidelines of future American policy in Cambodia and Vietnam, and on the search for peace in Southeast Asia.

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Dear Irving,

Thanks for yours of July 28— but I won’t really answer it as I’m desperately busy trying to get all the university business tidied up before taking off next Monday (Aug 10) for a much needed 3 week holiday in Europe. We expect to be in Montreal for several hours on Monday—from roughly 1 pm
to 10 pm—while we wait for our plane to leave that evening for London. If it’s convenient, Mary & I might come out & see you & Aviva. We’ll try to get your phone no from information & give you a call from the airport.

All the best,
Des

615. 120 St Clements,
Toronto, Canada
September 26, 1970

Dear Desmond,

Did you or did you not pass through Montreal when you said you would? We waited all day for a phone call from you which never came. I’d put in a stock of whisky, and Aviva had gone out to buy a lot of goodies she thought you and Mary wd like—so you can imagine how disappointed we all were, including the whisky and goodies!

Do you get down—or is it up—to Toronto at all? It seems to me you have little or no "connection or affection" for this city. Am I wrong in thinking so?

How was your trip abroad? I hope you were able to relax, and shake some of the worries out of your system. You certainly seem to have had more than your required human quota of them. Did the promotion come through, and must I now address my letters to the Vice-Principal of the University? You’re one man I know who deserves all the good things coming to him, and I think I’m privileged to share in the pleasure of your deserved success.

Was Mary able to do any painting?

I was very lucky to find a decent house in Toronto for a rent which everyone here tells me is miraculously low. It’s $250 per month, and I don’t think that’s low at all, at all, but more knowing heads than my own shake incredulously at the mention of this figure. We’ve sublet our house in Hampstead to a medical graduate and his family who we believe will look after it with some concern. Aviva and I like Toronto much more than at first we thought possible—the city does grow on one. It’s a tremendously vital place just now because most of the immigrants are coming here, as well as for other good reasons. The CBC, publishing houses, the universities, etc—-they all add up to a very stimulating intellectual bill of fare. By the by, I did a program for the CBC—"Me and My Critics"—and I mentioned you in it several times. I hope you catch it. It was done for Matinee. I’m also going to appear on TV with Kate Millett, the gal who wrote The Politics of Sex. Watch the pussy-hairs fly!

I’m enclosing some poems I did this summer. Tam Review has taken four others, and there will be a big Layton Spread in the Can Forum in Nov or Dec. One of the four poems Tam Review took is titled "Shakespeare", about 130 lines, and perhaps the best thing I did this summer. Altogether, despite my anxieties and harassment during what
were supposed to be my holidays, I think I did some of the best writing I’ve ever done.

Love,
Irving

PS My best love to Mary. Irving


2"Irving Layton and Kate Millett," Lifestyle (Helen Hutchison, moderator) CKLT-TV, Montreal, 2 Dec. 1970.

3Kate Millett (b. 1934), American feminist critic and activist; Sexual Politics (1970) was her Columbia PhD dissertation; Flying (1974) is a detailed autobiography.

4See 610.7.


September 29, 1970

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of Sept 26. I have been wondering what you were up to. Your letter leaves many unanswered questions--why have you moved from Montreal? has Aviva given up her U of Montreal studies? have you adopted Toronto for life or for a year, or what?

We were in Montreal between planes for 8 hours or more on Monday, August 11--we phoned you from the airport twice at decent intervals but got no answer. Eventually we gave up on you & went downtown & visited galleries & stores. Sorry we missed you--we do seem to have rotten luck in our attempts to get together.

Mary & I had a lovely holiday in England & Wales--five days in Cambridge, then four days in St Ives with Norman Levine & family, five days in Swansea with our son Philip & his wife, three days in Aberystwyth with an old Cambridge friend of mine--& a final week in Cambridge. Mary painted 17 magnificent watercolours of coast & mountains & I managed to put UNB & its problems almost completely out of my mind.

I was confirmed as Vice-President (Academic) in early July, after being given overwhelming support from the faculty, but the pleasure was strongly diluted by the fact that by then I had become acting president as well. I dreaded coming back from England as the prediction was that the president would not be able to function until November, if at all, & I expected to have to carry the whole burden. He made, however, a miraculous (although we are not sure how permanent) recovery, & he has been working half-time or more since early September. I have chaired meetings & so on for
him, but gradually I am concentrating on the vice-presidency and leaving the strictly presidential duties to him.

I don't often come to Toronto. I could have been there today, for the Dickens Festival at York, but decided to stick to my lot here.

I liked the poems you sent me very much indeed. They are straightforward, powerful, no-nonsense pieces.

My book of collected criticism of Grove has just come out from Ryerson Press, & I am busily putting together an anthology of English-Cdn lit for a Paris publisher—the book is for use in French schools & universities. So I'm not entirely out of the literary stakes—but it gets harder & harder to find time to write.

Mary will try to catch your radio & TV programmes—I hardly ever hear the radio or see TV.

Give my love to Aviva & David—and accept the same yourself. Let's hope we can find some occasion to get together before long.

As ever,
Des

1Philip Pacey was at the University of Swansea from 1969-71 as a post-doctoral fellow.

2Elizabeth (Young) Pacey (b. 1944), Halifax heritage activist, author of Churches of Nova Scotia and Old Halifax.

3For Enoch; see 447.9.

4"Dickens Centennial Festival," (sponsored by the English Department) York University, 28-29 September 1970.

5Desmond Pacey ed, Frederick Philip Grove Critical Views on Canadian Writers (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970).
editor, where I’ll be meeting Newlove and E. Birney who’s in town for a month or so. And a few days ago we had supper at the house of a colleague where I met an American poet and a very witty Englishman who, a genial bachelor, had seen a great deal of the world. And so it goes.

I did that TV show with Kate Millett last night. Just the tape, one hour, of which one-half will be taken for the showing some time in November. It was a pretty frazzling experience, for how does one talk to a militant ignoramus who wants to use poetry as polemics? Have you read her book Sexual Politics? I told her and the audience who will see and hear us about a month from now that her dissection of Lawrence was so much tommyrot, Marxism updated for Women’s Lib. God help the women of America—let alone the men—if these squashed—ovarian females become their leaders. What they really want is to kill off the men, so great is their hatred for them. Not that I don’t support many of the things that Women’s Lib wants, or don’t recognize the justice of some of their grievances. But justice is one thing, their methods and motivations for securing it another. As in other related matters, I like reforms but dislike the reformers who urge them on me. In this instance, my dislike reaches truly gargantuan dimensions.

My warmest congrats on your appointment as Vice-President of the university. It must be very gratifying to know that you had so many in the faculty voting for it. It’s a great feeling to know that one is admired and liked by one’s peers. I’m sure you’ll make good use of your office, though I am sorry to learn that your new duties might cut into the time you need for writing. However, I’m not too worried because I don’t think anything will ever take you "out of the literary stakes". Somehow you always manage to find time to write an article or short story or a compendious review. Really your industry and output stagger me.

I had a short note from Peter Stevens saying he was taking eight poems of mine to give me a spread in December’s issue of the Can Forum. Tam Review with four of my poems in it ought to be out any day now. Two of them you’ve already seen: "The Haunting" and "Dionysius in Hampstead". The titles of the other two are "Shakespeare" and "Eternal Recurrence". It’s a strong group, I think. Let me know what you think of them. I’m glad you liked the poems I sent you with my last letter, and think your remarks about them are right on target. You’ll find my forthcoming book, Nail Polish, made up for the most part of poems that can be called ‘straightforward...no-nonsense pieces.’ Those are the only sort of poem I want to write nowadays. Poems like hammerstrokes. Yet not lacking in either complexity or profundity. The language trimmed down to underpants or tights preferably with a Black Belt encircling it. I’m more tired of squeamishness and neurasthenia than I ever was. "Kvetch poetry" is my horror and abomination. It can join Kate Millett in Hades!
Before I run off the page: Aviva is finishing her MA thesis on Patrick White6, and has started work on her PhD by taking a course in Australian literature at York. Next year she’ll be completing her course requirements by taking another three. After that, we’re making tentative plans to live in Australia and perhaps Israel or Greece for two years before re-settling ourselves in Montreal. But a great deal of dirty water and menstrual blood will flow between now and then, and who knows where they’ll carry us...David is well, though he misses his gang of cronies. He’s as irritating as all hell, and a constant wonder and delight...even when I want to murder him. I’ve no doubt he’s a genius of sorts. My love to Mary.

Yours,
Irving

3Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1970).

618. October 9, 1970
Dear Irving,

Thanks for yours of October 5.
While I think of it, have a look at the current (Summer, 1970) issue of The Dalhousie Review, which contains my Sligo lecture on Yeats1 and a very perceptive (because flattering!) review of my book of essays2.

I cannot imagine you really acting like an old Forsyte—I can see Aviva as Irene or Fleur, but not you as Soames or Jolyon.

I am sure that Toronto is a "better" place for CBC interviews, panel shows etc—but are these really of any use to you? Don’t they drain off energy that might more properly be spent on your own writing? And are the Toronto people really more intelligent than those of Montreal (or Fredericton), or just more self-assured & brassy? I guess I’m asking these questions as much of myself as of you—for as you know I have had several opportunities to go to Toronto & have always turned them down, & sometimes I wonder whether going would have stimulated me in any real sense. One can meet Newlove & Birney anywhere, & I do frequently
meet the best Toronto professors—Creighton, Frye, Stacey—etc—at meetings & conferences.

What programme is your discussion with the Sex Politics lady to be on? I should like very much to see it.

Several people, including Mary, heard your Matinée radio talk about your critics, in which you were kind enough to mention me favourably.4

I shall be looking for the poems you mention in Canadian Forum and Tamarack Review. What did you think of Ron Everson’s poems in the current CF?5

Glad to hear Aviva is carrying on with her graduate studies. Is she taking the Australian course from Barry Argyle?6 He was at Sligo with me in August, 1969—a likeable young man.

But I hate to think of you both going off to Australia or Israel for two years!

Peter is perhaps my chief source of pride at the moment. As a rugby player, he is captain of UNB, member of the provincial all-star team, & is having a trial for the Canadian national team; as a student he is getting first class honours; as a poet, he is turning out some excellent & quite original pieces. The rest of the family are also flourishing—Michael, for example, is turning out reams of poetry, & hopes to get a book published in the near future.7

My love to Aviva & David.

As ever,

Des


4"Me and My Critics," Matinée CBC Radio, 30 September 1970. (Host Helen Hutchinson; Layton commented: "I can think of Milton Wilson, Desmond Pacey, Eli Mandel, and say Northrop Frye—I could go on and name a few others—who I think have helped to instruct a generation of Canadian readers to read poetry with that kind of passionate wisdom and understanding that a proper reading of poetry requires.")


6Barry Argyle, Professor of English at York University.

7Michael Pacey had recently assembled a group of fifty poems as an "alternative" highschool assignment; he did not publish a volume of poems until 1972.
Dear Desmond,

Maybe you’ve heard the news, but I’m now a DCL (honoris causa). DOKTOR Layton! I still unzipper my pants in the same old way, so don’t get alarmed. Bishop’s University conferred it on me last week, with Ralph Gustafson making the citation. Lots of people came up to congratulate me, and I had a difficult time keeping my face on an even keel between solemnity and amusement, especially when the Bishop of Quebec and the Bishop of Montreal were murmuring their congratulations and shaking my hand. Still, I guess history was made last week. Issie Lazarovitch, a Jew from the wrong side of the tracks receiving an honorary degree from the educational citadel of Quebec Waspdom! It’s a remarkable event from whatever perspective you see it, mine or Bishop’s. If I feel proud and gratified it’s not only for myself, but for my country as well. O Canada...

Of course I don’t expect to do very much writing at York; at any rate, not while I’m actually on campus. Three quarters of my time is taken up with writing letters, answering phonecalls, sending and receiving messages, attending committee meetings, etc. It’s a delusion and a snare to dream of freedom, at any rate of the kind of freedom one needs for poetic composition. I mean the freedom to dream. I’m like a fly that’s fallen into a cup of oil, with obligations of one sort or another to the fluid that buoys me up and keeps me from using my wings. Something is always going on: a reading by Earle Birney, a lecture on Dickens by Anthony Burgess, a colloquy by Herr Shnitzel and Mme Frankenfart. How can I miss hearing them and risk the imprisonment of my intellect? It would be unforgivably remiss of me to do so, now that I’ve such an excellent opportunity to expand my mental horizons through contact with university chancellors and presidents; eminent journalists, panelists and TV personalities whose names are household words, their faces no less familiar than the products they help to advertise. Believe me, the impression they make on me is unforgettable, and I treasure their every slightest word.

Aviva is having an even better time of it than I am. Yes, she’s taking BA’s course in Australian literature and finds it interesting; not the mass of 3rd rate stuff she’s had to plough through but the seminar meetings and Argyle’s presentation. After the cultivated chi-chi is over, she’s to be found in the Faculty common room, queen-beeing it with half the males in the English Department. What a sight! Just made to order for a rough-and-tumble cynic like myself, steeped in the acidulous wisdom of Nietzsche. I’m more convinced than ever that the teaching of literature is an occupation suitable only to women, and that no self-respecting male should ever touch it. No male with balls! For it turns a man womanish: gossipy, timorous and horribly repressed. I could advance a thousand reasons why this should be so, except that I’m too considerate to bore you.
Maybe one day I’ll say it in a poem or short story. Yah, I think I’m going to write some more short stories, because I don’t need to weave dreams in prose, just observe and put it all down as I see it.

The program I did with Kate Millett was pretty stupid. My native chivalry with women stopped me from cracking her over the head, which is what she was really asking for. She’s a militant ignoramus; whose book, Sexual Politics I now suspect was ghost-written by somebody in the office of Doubleday’s, if not in whole, certainly in large part. She’s a menace, not to men, but to her own sex; and if women know what’s good for them—and they always do—they’ll shut her up as soon as possible. She’s doing them and their cause a great deal of harm. Besides her, that other prick-envying feminist, Betty Friedan, is an intellectual giant...

What do you make of events in Quebec? I was in Montreal during the crisis. In fact, we even had something of a bomb scare when I was at Bishop’s because someone phoned in to say that a bomb had been placed in the auditorium where convocation was to be held. Happily, it turned out to be a hoax. I was at Gustafson’s when Trudeau made his speech justifying the imposition of the War Measures Act. We watched him on TV, and we both applauded his vigour and courage. How very un-Canadian! Imagine Lester Pearson in this situation; or Mackenzie King. I sent a wire to the PM as follows: "I’m with you, Trudeau; a bas les bleeding hearts." When I returned to York I learned that Eli Mandel and about 20 others, prominent Torontonians in publishing, academic life, TV, etc, had also sent a telegram to Trudeau—deploring the War Measures Act and calling it an affront to dissent. Well, it didn’t surprise me. Intellectuals nowadays are almost entirely alienated from the people and from the real issues. Luckily for democratic government both here and in the United States, the common people exhibit more good sense than they do, and deserve the faith that Lincoln placed in them.

I share your pride and delight in your sons. Remember me to them, and give my love to Mary.

Yours,
Irving

enclosure: Orange Bear Reader 4 (1970), including Layton’s "For Anna" (For Desmond & Mary, Much love, Irving) np.

1Bishop’s University conferred an honourary doctorate (DCL) on Layton at their Convocation in October 1970.

2Earle Birney, poetry reading, York University, 22 October 1970.

3Anthony Burgess, "Dickens as Earman, or a Voice Through the Gaslight," (Dickens Festival) York University, 28 September 1970.
Betty (Goldstein) Friedan (b. 1921), founder and first president of NOW (National Organization for Women); author of the pioneer feminist text *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and the revisionist *The Second Stage* (1981).

The kidnapping on October 5 and October 10, 1970, respectively of James Cross and Pierre Laporte by the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) an extremist separatist organization led on October 16 to the outlawing of the organization and assumption of emergency powers by the Canadian government under the War Measures Act of 1914. After invoking the Act in the House of Commons, Trudeau appeared on a national radio and television broadcast on the evening of the 16th defending his decision.

Layton alludes to Lincoln statements such as the famous "It is true that you may fool all of the people some of the time; you can even fool some of the people all of the time; but you can't fool all of the people all the time." To a caller at the White House, from Alexander K. McClure, *Lincoln's Yarns and Stories* (1904).

620.

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your trenchant and amusing letter of October 23.

Congratulations on the honorary degree from Bishop's. I had seen in the Montreal paper that you were to get such a degree. Several of my friends were honoured together—Malcolm McGregor, Geoff Andrew, you & I believe one or two others I know. Bishop's showed surprisingly good judgment—I wonder whose idea it was?

I am still rather puzzled by your attitude towards York. The cynical tone of your paragraphs about life there is what I should expect (& hope) from you—but if you find it all so trivial why do you stay?

As for the teaching of literature being for women, I half agree with you. Certainly there is nothing that turns me off more quickly than a large gathering of Professors of English, all twittering away in their pet jargon and dropping the names of "eminent scholars" and the titles of obscure "works of scholarship." On the other hand, I love the rough & tumble of a good graduate seminar on Donne or Yeats, talking not about what the critics say but what Donne & Yeats were really saying. I think the point is that, like everything else, the study of literature has its false & its true forms, its phony practitioners and its real aficionados. The hard-riding intellectual hunt involved in interpreting Yeats' "Byzantium" is in no way womanish, nor for that matter is the aesthetic joy of finally "cracking" the structure of a poem long puzzled over & seeing why it was put together the way it was.

I share your admiration for Trudeau's firmness—for once we see eye to eye on a political issue. In spite of his bachelor-hood, he has balls.

I face a very busy ten days. Tomorrow I go to Saint John, where I appear on a panel re: graduate studies in English at a conference of English professors from all over the Atlantic Provinces & speak at their annual banquet.
Saturday night (on "The Search for F.P. Grove"). Sunday morning I leave for Winnipeg, where for five days I attend conferences of the Can Assoc. of Grad Schools & the Assoc of Canadian Universities. From Winnipeg I go on to Calgary, as "external expert" to appraise the English Dept of the Univ of Calgary & its fitness to launch a PhD. I shan’t be getting back to Fredericton till Monday, Nov 9.

Mary has an exhibition of her recent watercolours showing in Saint John at the moment—they are mainly things she did this summer in England & Wales, together with a few Irish ones from last summer.

I’m glad Aviva is having such a queenly time with the panting (& de—panting) males of York. Tell her I wish she could be queening it over me—I should be delighted to kneel at her feet and suffer all kinds of indignities. I have a strong masochistic streak & can think of no more delightful person under whose tutelage to gratify it. I swoon at the mere prospect!

Here’s wishing you a good sex life!

As ever,
Des P

1Malcolm McGregor (1910—89), Canadian scholar of classical Greece, Professor of Classics at the University of Cincinnati (1940-54) and the University of British Columbia (1954—77); author of The Athenians and their Empire (1987) and (with Meritt and Wade-Gery) The Athenian Tribute Lists (1939-53).

2Geoffrey Andrew (1906—86), Director, Canadian Information Service 1945-47; Professor of English, University of British Columbia (1947-62); awarded DCL from Bishop’s in 1970.


November 21, 1970
Dear Desmond,

Please excuse my long silence. The last few weeks have been very rough, loads of things to attend to inside and outside the university purlieus. I shan’t bore you with the details, your own experience can help you imagine them. Teaching and learning doesn’t seem to be the first consideration in a university; other matters are much higher on the priority list. Like committee meetings or PR work, so that the university can get its quota of students to qualify for gov’t grants. Etcetera. Next week I have to prepare a talk for some of the teachers in the province because each year York arranges a two-day affair for them. Yesterday I took part in the dedication ceremony for Stong College. This coming Wednesday I’m giving a lecture on the
proletarian novel of the 30’s for one of my colleagues. Eli Mandel wants me to talk to his classes, and I’ve already given a reading at Glendon College where his wife, Anne is giving a course in Canadian literature. On Friday morning I shall be lecturing and giving a reading at Centennial College where Ruth Colombo teaches. And so it goes. I’m on a treadmill, a merry-go-round. I’m Sisyphus forever pushing the academic stone uphill and watching it come crashing down each Monday morning when I must begin the never-ending toil again.

I’m enjoying of course every minute of it because firstly I like teaching and secondly I enjoy meeting different people and getting into different situations. I’ve the certainty moreover of knowing that everything I do, everything that happens to me, will eventually flower into some lines that would otherwise never have gotten themselves written. I’ve tested myself too often and too variously, not to have this certainty. I’ve an amazing ability to assimilate my experiences, to reach out and ingest just about everything that surrounds me. I’m the sceneshifter of one of my own poems, arranging the episodes of my life to provide my poems—vampires, every damned one of them—with the nourishment they need. There are times when I feel that my physical being is under the collective ownership of all the poems I’ve written or ever will write, or rather that I’m being manipulated by some creative horla who pushes me into different lives or episodes so that I can co-operate with him in his need to express himself. Luckily for both of us, I like his rage and range.

Just finished looking at the proofs of *Nail Polish*. John Newlove brought them over—he’s working for McStew—and we had a good talk. I like him and I admire his intelligence which is something I do not often say about poets. Like myself he’s a bibliomaniac with an uncontrollable lust for books. He’s certainly a meticulous editor, to judge from the way he’s handled my book, spotting errors as if it was his own book he was bringing out. He has a quiet manner, and eyes and forehead that—oddly—remind one of AM Klein’s. He’s not as witty or as exuberant as the Klein I remember, but he has a sly humour and his judgements on poets and poems are almost as infallibly good as my own. I’d like to see more of him, but I suspect he’s something of a recluse, so I shan’t push our acquaintance beyond the point he wishes to take it to.

Is there any hope of your coming to Toronto? Aviva and I would very much like to have you stay with us, particularly Aviva who is eager to learn what ‘indignities’ you have in mind. She’s much intrigued by your suggestion and is wondering whether to invest in a whip or a belt with a brass buckle. I warn you she has an arm like a piston!

Yours,
Irving

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1 The dedication ceremony for Strong College at York University was held 21 November 1970.

3 In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was a King of Corinth condemned in Tartarus perpetually to roll uphill a large rock which, when the top was reached, rolled down again.

4 A horla is an incubus or vampire-figure which imparts a profound sense of depression to its host, as in Guy de Maupassant's Le horla (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1887).

5 John Newlove worked for McClelland and Stewart from 1969-75.

622. November 29, 1970

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of November 21. You do indeed sound to be very busy with a multitude of pseudo-academic pursuits. You must be the contemporary version of Renaissance man, equally adept at dedicating a college, lecturing on the proletarian novel, reading your own verse, pontificating on committees and—I hope—occasionally laying about you with the sword of lust. Have you noticed a steady expansion of your hat-sizes since moving to Toronto? Has your voice taken on a tone of authority? Do you even fuck with more formality?

It must be comforting to know—not merely to hope, but to be sure—that all these social & academic trivialities will gradually load every rift with ore—ore to be transmuted in God's good time into the pure gold of LITERATURE!

By God your conceit is awesome, in the true sense of that word. An "amazing ability to assimilate my experience" no less—what a high-falutin' way to say that when you eat you form shit! "The scene-shifter of my own poems"—don't play yourself down so. You a mere scene-shifter? I know that to be a scene-shifter in your poems is like being chambermaid to Her Majesty—but even that is not worthy of you.

On the other hand, if (as I gather—you don't actually say so) Nail Polish is the title of your forthcoming book of verse, I congratulate you on your realism. You recognize that your own verse is like nail polish—has a high gloss but no function, is used mainly by women and a few effeminate men, is translucent because it has no substance, has its only practical application on the thighs of ladies (where it stops runs in nylons!), and has a distinctly unpleasant smell which lingers in the nostrils for some hours.

I also like the realism of your remark—intended as boast but coming across as unconscious humility—that you have acquired "an uncontrollable lust for books." There was a time when you boasted of an uncontrollable lust for cunts, but, alas!, time has caught up with even that great Canadian lay Layton, who at long last has given up the joy of turning the pink labia of young ladies for that of turning the grey leaves of ancient volumes. No wonder Aviva begs me to make
a visit! She knows that Pacey will never turn in his prick for a bookmark!

Shall I use the remainder of this paper to detail the indignities with which I should delight Aviva to subject me? To do so, sir, would be to risk turning you aside from the high intellectual endavours to which you have now set your hand, to tempt you back to the paths of dailiance where you no longer deign to walk. No, I do not want to be the one responsible for arousing from its twenty months of strong sleep that once-mighty Layton tool. Let our mutual dignities and indignities remain a matter of secret salacity between Australian cup-bearer and New Zealand lancer, two fine ones whose uncontrollable lust for one another may yet set the world a-flame. You sir, go on about your dusty business, addressing college communities, emitting your nail polish poetry, & turning the dry pages of your ancient tomes--while I sport with Aviva in the shade!

Love,
Des


December 17, 1970
Dear Desmond,

Just got back from another trip to Montreal where I saw my son, Max, whose marriage seems to be breaking up--no fault of his--and my friend, Bill, whose marriage ought to break up, but alas no such luck. I've concluded there are two ways in which a man may be turned into a mouse or a eunuch. One of these is through marriage, the other is through being a member of an English department. I'm about to head a movement for the speedy abolition of both. Will you join?

John Newlove was at my place two nights ago. Earlier in the day I'd read your review of his book, The Cave, and I mentioned it to him. Of course he had seen it, and he was pleased that it had been favourable but he was somewhat disgruntled that you had praised him for the wrong reasons. He doesn't think of himself as "artless", and doesn't relish being compared to Souster, for whose work he has an immeasurable disdain. Newlove believes he's about the only craftsman in verse this country has, though he grudgingly concedes that my own verse exhibits some craft also--but only in flickers. No, that's not quite fair to either of us. Actually, he has an enormous respect for my work, and the adjective he most often uses for it is "subtle". Fair enough! He thinks "Osip Mandelshtam" one of my great poems, and quite beyond his present reach or that of anyone else writing verse today. When he talks this way, it's difficult to argue with him. And why should I? It's just possible he may be right.
I found your letter very amusing, but one or two things in it perplex me. Why should you suppose that my coming to Toronto would increase my good opinion of myself? And where did you pick up the strange notion that I 'pontificate' on committees? I avoid them like the plague and can be brought to attend them only under duress. What in the name of Jaysun are all these goings-on but trivialities, the constant intriguing and push-push for promotions and better pay? Do you expect me to take these things seriously? You must be out of your cotton-pickin' Frederictonian mind...It sometimes occurs to me that you mightn't be joking at all when you write that my voice has 'taken on a new tone of authority'. Surely you're not insane enough--though who knows what effect the bleakness and isolation of Fredericton might have on a sensitive mind --to think professorships and doctorates are what I hitherto lacked to give me a feeling of self-assurance. Man, you'd better see a shrink! You're in a bad way. I've had that tone of authority all my life. I was born with it. In public school my nickname was Napoleon, and there are still some graduates of Alexandra about who call me by that name when they run into me.

Haven't I told you I was born circumcized, the only Jew since Moses who had this birthmark of distinction? Rabbis came from all over Eastern Europe to look at my little prick, thinking I might be the promised Messiah and Deliverer of my people. Even when I began to read atheistical books like *Origin of Species* and Robert Ingersoll's *Lectures*, my mother was convinced I was the Messiah who would one day accomplish the ingathering of the exiles. It makes my sides shake with laughter that you should think a mere professorship would make my voice sound more authoritative. Desmond, my dear friend, do find yourself some other delusion. This one has all the marks of an incipient psychosis. Or it might just be senility setting in somewhat prematurely.

I didn't say 'I've acquired an uncontrollable lust for books.' I said that was behind me, that all my lust now is for living, for life and for more life, you silly academic who betrays himself when he compares the divine process by which experience is turned into poetry to a bowel movement. Do you see why I am so arrogant? It's all the fault of people like yourself! My joy is forever beyond your comprehension. At best you can only stumble in its radiance.

O what a lovely peroration. All the best to you and Mary, and God love you.

Hugs,
Irving

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1 Bill Goodwin, see 288.3.


4 Layton attended Alexandra Public School on Sanguinet Street 1919-25.

5 Layton claims to have been born circumcised—a sign of the messiah; see Elspeth Cameron's Irving Layton: A Portrait 467.


7 Robert Ingersoll, Ingersoll's 44 Complete Lectures (Chicago: Donohue, 1924).

624. January 5, 1971

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of Dec 17, which you did not post till Dec 21, & which then took a deuce of a time in coming. I was beginning to be afraid that I had hurt your feelings with my last letter, which of course was written in sheer fun and as an escape from the pressures of this office. (Incidentally, our president, who was seemingly making a miraculous recovery from his cancer operation, broke his leg over the holiday, so I'm back on double duty again & just about ready to crack under the strain.)

Sorry to hear of the imminent break-up of Max's marriage. Is Max still a student at Sir George, or what is he up to?

I don't remember now what I said about Newlove—so I've just looked it up in the Forum. As usual, the review has not been carefully read—when I write, every word counts! I didn't say Newlove was "artless", I said he was "apparently artless"—and there's a world of difference! "Second & subsequent readings reveal nuances, patterns and implications which a first reading might miss."—is that artlessness? "This poetry of Newlove's, for all its seeming artlessness, is poetry of a high order." What the hell else does he want? The fucking Nobel Prize?

May I tell you what I've been up to, in the intervals of committee meetings, memoranda, conferences etc etc? I've read the galley proofs of my forthcoming edition of the selected short stories of Frederick Philip Grove,1 & I've finished the typescript of my 300 page anthology of English-Canadian Lit for my Paris publisher2—you're in it, & you'll be hearing from the publisher about permissions. I've tried to make it la crème de la crème—twenty poets (from Roberts to Atwood) and ten prose writers (from Leacock to Nowlan). By keeping the number of poets down, I was able to give a substantial sampling of each—about ten poems. In a way it's a pity it's to be published only in France, for it would be a most useful anthology for Canadian students. And the "introduction" is a masterpiece of concentrated insights!
Now I must get on with the edition of Grove letters\(^3\) & write the three short stories for which I have made notes—if I ever get a minute.
Write & cheer me up—I really am terribly exhausted.
Love to yourself & Aviva!

Des

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1See 586.5.
2See 615.6.
3See 586.5.


625.[pc] Stong College, York University January 7, 1971

Dear Desmond,
I hope you do realize that my 'megalomaniacal' letters are meant as spoofs! It occurred to me that you might be silly enough to take them seriously and not cotton on to the fact that I enjoy anticipating and satisfying your various fantasies. If you considered them as 'bad' or incomplete poems written in a dry season, you would not be too far from the truth.
A very good new year to you & Mary.

Much love,
Irving

626. January 12, 1971

Dear Irving,
Thanks for your postcard of Jan. 7. Of course I realize that your megalomaniacal letters are spoofs—and my replies are also spoofs!
Lookit—on Feb 12-13 I am to be in Ottawa for a Royal Society meeting. Mary would like to come to Ontario that weekend with me, & stay with her elderly (84 yr old) father who lives between Toronto & Hamilton. I thought I might fly down from Ottawa to Toronto that Saturday afternoon after my meeting, & stay with you overnight. Then I could get together with Mary on the Sunday & we could fly back together.
How does this strike you? Is the time convenient? Have you room for me? Does Aviva want me? Do you want me? Does David want me?

Love,
Des
Dear Desmond,

Don't worry about the president; he broke his leg to indicate that he's in no hurry to meet his Maker.1 A man who can make a 'miraculous recovery' from a cancer operation (and you had described him as being at death's door) has many tricks and signals up his sleeve, or is it his trouser leg.

This is going to be a short letter because I'm on my way to Montreal; I wanted to get it in the mail before I left. I'll be seeing Max, of course, and one or two friends, as well as my sisters whom I call the "Three Graces". Do you know my eldest sister is nearly seventy-five? I have a sister, Esther, who is crowding seventy-two, and can dance the two of us under the table, there's so much vitality in her. You ask about Max. Well, he's still at Sir George, doing brilliantly in philosophy, writing some fine poems and short stories. He's badly shaken up by his matrimonial troubles, since he loves his wife and little daughter. When I was in Montreal for the Xmas holidays, I heard him sing a piece he had composed out of his pain, and migod, it was a very moving thing indeed. It was at one of the Xmas parties, and he sang and played his song on the guitar, and everybody stopped chattering to listen to him. "Our sweetest songs are those that..."2 Damn it, it's true: but why does it have to be?

I saw Newlove a few days ago. His main bug, I think, is that you coupled or compared him with Souster. He characterized that as the bland leading the bland!3 Newlove's reached a critical juncture. He's acquired a reputation, what every poet sweats and suffers for, and is not too sure he's now got enough gas inside him to sustain it, or carry it forward. I myself was never attacked by such doubts (maybe because of the splotchy nature of my 'fame') but I can put myself into his shoes. There ARE forms of torture the Chinese never invented!

Will you be reviewing 15 Canadian Poets4 just brought out by Oxford Press, and edited by Geddes?5 It's a handsome book, but I'm astonished that Dudek and Acorn are not in it, but Bowering, Coleman, and Ondaatje are. I think Dudek is getting a raw deal all around; he's a far more substantial poet than the current fashions will allow. He's written some lyrics that are among the best in this country. And he's got a range that few or none of the younger poets try for nowadays. Why is he so consistently overlooked by the anthologists?

Take care of yourself, Desmond. This country needs your good sense, generosity, and humour. Love to yourself and Mary.

Irving

1James Dineen, see 612.1.

"And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." Matthew 15:14.


Gary Geddes (b 1940), poet (Letter of the Master of Horse 1973), anthologist and editor (Twentieth Century Poetry and Poetics 1969), founder (with Hugo McPherson) of the Studies in Canadian Literature series, and short story writer (The Unsettling of the West 1986).

628. [January 14-28, 1971]

Desmond:
The 18th is fine. Come and spend the weekend with us. Aviva and I, David too will be delighted to see you. Sorry, I've not been able to write. I will though, this Sunday.

Irv

1This undated note was scribbled on a York "Inter-Department Mailer."

629. February 4, 1971

Dear Desmond,

By now you’ve probably received Nail Polish and read my scrawl on the wrapping cover. We’d be delighted to have you stay with us; it’s been such a long time since we sat around a good warming fire, drank and talked. Of course, knowing your depraved tastes, we might spend Saturday night watching the topless girls in one of the downtown bars, but I warn you they’re pallid and mechanical beside the belly-dancers in Montreal. I spent a couple of hours there one late afternoon and I found my mind wandering to Kant’s Prolegomena, and realized I’d wasted my money. Well, not quite. The expressions on the faces of the Torontonians was more interesting than the mechanical bumps and grinds, or the bored smiles and grimaces. I wonder why the Women’s Lib doesn’t do something for these unfortunate girls?

Voznesensky is coming to Toronto, Friday [the] 11th. He’ll be reading at the U of Toronto, and John Colombo has arranged for some of the local poets and their wives to meet him in the evening. I was supposed to read at Acadia that Friday, but I’ve cancelled the reading; or rather I’ve put it off until the 26th. It’s been years since I read at Acadia. This coming Tuesday I shall be giving a reading at Loyola University in Montreal. Odd, isn’t it: Loyola U, a Catholic institution, has asked me twice now, also Sir Thomas More, another Catholic learnery; McGill—my own alma mater—not once, not anyhow within recent memory. And the last time I read at Sir George Williams, where I taught for nearly twenty years, must have been five or six years ago. I don’t know whether I made many friends when I was at either place, but it does seem I influenced many people...
Canadian Puppet Festivals have built their entire puppet show around some 24 poems of mine. Kate Reid and I recorded them and Dora and Leo Velleman will interpret through puppetry. They are entering the show in the Drama Festival, and calling it Love Where the Nights Are Long. There will be a presentation in Toronto about the middle of this month.

How's Peter doing these days? Did he finish his essay on Layton's poetic craft? I'd be curious to see it, if he did. Is Mary painting? But of course: she's as revved up as I am! Give her my love. I'm looking forward to seeing you both.

Shalom,
Irving

1Immanuel Kant, Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be able to Present Itself as a Science trans. Peter G. Lucas (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1953).

2Andrei Voznesensky (b 1933), Soviet poet, disciple of Pasternak, author of Little Woods: Recent Poems (1972), and Nostalgia for the Present (1978).

3Andrei Voznesensky, poetry reading, University of Toronto, 11 February 1971.


5Layton, poetry reading, Loyola University, 9 February 1971.

6Irving Layton et al., Love Where the Nights Are Long (an abstract puppet ballet) presented by Canadian Puppet Festivals (Leo and Dora Velleman) at "Puppet and his World Puppet Festival" sponsored by the Ontario Puppetry Association at the Saint Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto, 12-14 February 1971. (Poems by Layton, Jay Macpherson, George Bowering, Leonard Cohen and Gertrude Katz read by Kate Reid and Irving Layton; restaged at the Dominion Drama Festival in Ottawa in May.)
Mary at the airport—she will have been spending two or three days with her aged father in Waterdown near Hamilton.

Peter has a poem in the latest issue of Copperfield & has about six new poems to peddle. Michael has just put together a collection of 40 of his poems for possible publication. Peter did finish his essay on you—right now he’s doing his honours thesis on the dev’t of Nowlan. Mary hasn’t done any painting lately—is busy with her swimming in her spare time.

Have read the galleys of my edition of Grove’s short stories & have sent the typescript of the anthology to Paris.

Love,
Des


2Michael Pacey’s collection of poems was an "alternative" project for his highschool English class.


631. March 9, 1971

Dear Irving & Aviva,

I am afraid you will think I am terribly rude & ungrateful for not having written before this to thank you for your gracious hospitality to Mary & me during our recent visit to Toronto. Ever since I got back I have been working night & day on our brief to the Higher Education Commission requesting funds for the next few years & spelling out the new programmes we plan to introduce etc. I have just had to let all my correspondence pile up, & I am sorry that I did not ever find time to write to you.

In spite of the usual Irving-Desmond gerfuffle at the beginning, the trip to Toronto was eminently worthwhile. It was great to see you both again and to have the opportunity to see a bit of York University.

What did you think of Jack McClelland’s announcement of the probable sale of his firm? What the hell is happening?

And what did you think of the GG’s Awards? I thought they were perverse—though I must admit I haven’t read Godfrey’s novel. I hope to find time to write a longer letter next time—meanwhile my love to you both.

Des

1McClelland’s decision to quit was the subject of a Quill and Quire article:
In a hastily-called press conference on February 15th, the president of McClelland and Stewart Limited announced that his company is on the market..."I think the publishing business is a business for young people. I would like to leave."

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of March 31 and for the enclosed letter from McClelland & Stewart re permission fees for my Paris anthology. OCDL2 gave me no idea what they would be willing to pay, & so I don’t know how they will react to $20 a poem. Dorothy Livesay is giving me hers at $2 a poem & Louis Dudek is charging nothing. The $20 is the highest fee anyone has suggested--but let’s hope OCDL will pay it.

I’m glad you liked the selection--yes, "To A Very Old Woman" is a tremendous poem.

I hope the invitation from Russia comes through.

I have just returned from a weekend meeting of the Royal Society in Sackville, where I had a most pleasant time with such old friends as Malcolm Ross, Clarence Tracy, Roy Daniells, etc. Next weekend Mary & I drive to Halifax & Wolfville for a little holiday, & to allow Mary Ann to be interviewed for a lectureship in English at Acadia.5 Our son Philip was interviewed for an assistant professorship of chemistry at both Mt A & Dalhousie6 last week, & is now in Los Angeles reading a paper to the American Chemical Society. When I realize that Philip will be 30 this Fall I begin to feel the weight of the years!

My love to Aviva & David.

As ever,
Des

1Fugitive.

2Paris-based French publisher L’Office Central de Librarie.


4Clarence Tracy (b. 1908), Professor of English at the University of Alberta (1936-47), UNB (1947-50), Saskatchewan (1950-66), UBC (1966-68), Acadia (1968-73); author of The Artificial Bastard (1953) and editor of The Poetical Works of Richard Savage (1962).

5Mary Ann Pacey taught in the English department at Acadia 1971-72.

6Philip Pacey joined the Chemistry Department at Dalhousie in the fall of 1971.
Dear Irving,

Thank you for sending me the booklet of poems by members of your workshop. I enjoyed reading your "preface," and the poem "Mountain Oysters" by Pat Lane is a very powerful one indeed. I don't foresee immortality for any of the others, however.

Peter has just distinguished himself by winning the Bliss Carman Poetry Prize here, and is off to Boston tomorrow to play rugby against Harvard, Tufts, Boston College, etc.

Mary Ann has accepted a lectureship in English at Acadia for next year, and Philip an assistant professorship of Chemistry at Dalhousie.

I have written my "Canada" piece for *Maclean's* but am not very pleased with it. The Grove book of short stories should be out any day—in fact it was scheduled for April.

I hope all goes well with you and Aviva and David.

All the best,
Des Pacey

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1 Irving Layton, ed., *i side up* (York Poetry Workshop) (Toronto: the authors, 1971).

2 Layton, "Foreword," *i side up* 1-3.

3 Patrick Lane, "Mountain Oysters," *i side up* 45.

4 The Bliss Carman Poetry Prize, sponsored by the English department, is awarded to the undergraduate submitting the best group of six poems of not more than forty lines each; it was first awarded in 1931.

5 On May 1 *Maclean's* published "My Canada" by Al Purdy, the first in a series of articles by such distinguished Canadians as Phyllis Webb, Alden Nowlan, Mayor Moore etc; Pacey's submission did not appear in print.
'natural' than writing prose. I guess that’s because it accords with my complex, dialectical view of things, of even the simplest. It’s when I’m most blunt, gruffest, that I feel I’m most dishonest.

Did I tell you that someone is translating me into Italian? His name is Amleto Lorenzini, and he’s translated Joyce’s Ulysses, Frye’s Anatomy of Criticism, as well as many other important books. He began by wanting to translate 15 or 20 poems, and became so wildly excited that he’s now well on the way towards 100. The book will have both English and Italian, side by side, and ought to see publication this autumn, shortly after Poems comes out. It will be published in Milan. Lorenzini is convinced I’m the greatest Italian poet since Dante, certainly that no modern or contemporary poet in Italy can be compared with me. Reading Pavese, Ungaretti, etc I’m not going to dispute with him. Since concurrently I’m also being translated into German, and after my reading tour of Russia in September most certainly into Russian, Canadians are going to have their noses so sadly pulled out of joint when they learn just what my range & achievement are. But that is an old story, right? Even you grudgingly gave me ten memorable poems. Ass!!

By the way, Northrop Frye is writing a Foreword to the Italian volume. I think that’s very handsome of him.

I’m leaving for Lisbon on the 22nd of June. From there I’ll make my way to Molibos, Greece, where I’ll join Aviva and David. I’ve sworn not to write a single line of anything this summer. What are your plans? It must feel good to have Mary Ann and Philip established in sister universities so close to you. I share your pride and pleasure. Warmest love to Mary, and congrats to Peter. Take care of yourself.

Yours, Irving


4Cesare Pavese (1908-50), poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist and translator, literary spokesman of his generation in Italy, author of Lavorare stanca (1936) and Notte di festa (1953).
Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888-1970), Italian poet and translator. Associated with the Futurists early in his career, he went on to develop his personal brand of lyrical modernism; author of L'Allegria (1931) and La terrapromissa (1950).

A book of translations of Layton's poetry into German has not appeared, but Layton may be referring to translations of his poetry in German periodicals.

This project was not realized.

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of May 11—sorry to have been rather slow answering it, but our convocation was held yesterday & I have been hectically busy preparing for it. By the way, that big blonde male friend of Peter’s, Rick Adams,1 got his MA for his thesis on your work2 at the convocation. Peter got his BA with First Class Honours in English and won the Bliss Carman Memorial Poetry Prize.

Is The Poems of I.L. to be a sort of paperback selected, like Birney’s—or is it a new hardcover collected poems, or what? Glad to hear of the project of translating you into Italian. Just think of the time you could have with those beautiful women of Rome if your work was available to them in their own language!

Sorry in a way to hear that you’ll be in Europe all summer—or after June 22. We were hoping that you & Aviva might come down & visit us in August. Our plans are to spend July in Europe—partly in France, partly in England—but to be at home here in August as our daughter Tish is to be married on August 14.3

Have not had time to write anything lately except an article on our last summer’s visit with Norman Levine, which is in the May issue of the Atlantic Advocate.4 Have two stories in note form & hope to do them soon. Am also working in odd moments on the edition of Grove’s letters, which should be ready for the publisher this Fall.

All the best,

Des

1Richard Adams (b. 1945), Professor of English at Marianopolis College in Quebec.


3Patricia Pacey married Charles Thornton on August 14, 1971.

636. 120 St Clements Ave, Toronto, Ontario. May 31, 1971

Dear Desmond,

"That big blond male friend" of Peter’s never bothered to even acknowledge, let alone answer, a letter I sent him in which I replied to some pretty straight questions he put to me. At this point I don’t know whether he ever got my letter with the info and cogitations he asked from me. However I am glad he got his MA. I wonder if I’ll get the chance to read his thesis on me. Fred was his supervisor, wasn’t he?

You must be very proud of Peter, running off with First Class Honours in English and the Bliss Carman Memorial Poetry Prize. He must be very proud of himself—and has every right to. Few are they who can be both scholar and poet. Of course there’s Eli Mandel and Peter Stevens—and George Whalley. EM has gotten a sabbatical and is off to Europe with his family. He’s working on another book of poems, and also on a collection of critical pieces, and hopes to present the world with both when he returns from his travels abroad.

The Poems of IL—that’s a big blockbuster of a book, total opus, 660 poems or thereabouts. I’ve lost count, and Newlove is as vague about the exact no as I am. McStew is bending every sinew to make it an attractive book: hardback, cover design by Harold Town (my phiz!) as large as Nail Polish, but of course thicker, much thicker. The paperback edition will appear in 2 vols. Won’t all this be a great thing to get back to when I return from Greece? Visions of the book will no doubt mingle with the more immediate and substantial ones the Medit beaches will give me, but thinking of the smooth, innocent covers of a book might be a welcome change!

I’m quite pleased with the "Foreword". I finished it last week, after making four drafts. Maclean’s has taken it for their "My Canada" series, and I rec’d a very laudatory letter from P Newman. Funny thing, after I rec’d his letter, accepting the piece, I sent him the final version, the sixth one. I haven’t heard from him about that one, but I’ve no doubt he’ll like the changes I made. Eli Mandel and his wife, Anne, thought it one of my better intros—and it was only my 2nd draft!

I’d like to see your piece in the Atlantic Advocate. If it isn’t too much trouble, please send it to me. I’m curious about your impressions of Norman Levine and his set-up in Cornwall. I recently met Mordecai Richler. It was at the coming-out party for his latest book, St Urbain’s Horseman, and he was looking more liverish, more saddish, and lack-lustreish than ever. Poor chap, he looked as if he came to his own funeral, and was disappointed that it wasn’t to be that after all, but a party. Ha! Ha—but the eyes very, very sad and the corners of the mouth turned down.
PS My love to Mary. Thanks for thinking of having us up for August. It wd have given us much pleasure to be at Tish's wedding. Please give her my fondest best wishes and regards. Irving


5Peter Newman, letter to Irving Layton 26 May 1971, Layton Collection, Concordia University Library.

6Peter Newman, editor of Maclean's 1970-present and journalist.

June 16, 1971

Dear Irving,

Sorry to have been so long answering your letter of May 31, 1971--but almost immediately thereafter I left for the annual meeting of the Royal Society in Ottawa,¹ & I have only just returned.

I am afraid I can't tell you anything more at the moment about that big blonde friend of Peter's--Rick Adams. He is away for the summer, but will be back as a PhD candidate in the Fall. I'll try to remember to ask him if he ever got your letter. I imagine he did--but I believe he's a bit sloppy about things like answering letters.

I again have cause to be proud of Peter--he's been chosen as the sole NB representative to play in the Possibles versus Probables trial rugby match in Toronto this weekend--on the basis of which trial he may be picked to tour England & Wales this fall as a member of the Canadian national team. Don't be surprised if you get a telephone call from him Saturday or Sunday.

Shall be looking forward to your Poems.

Tish is to go for her honeymoon in Greece in mid-August--mainly on Crete, I believe. Maybe you'll run into her, if you're still there. Mary & I leave for Paris two weeks from tomorrow, July 1.

I don't have an extra copy of that issue of the Atlantic Advocate, but I have just called the editor & he will send me several. When I get them I will send one to you.

Mordecai Richler has invited me to visit him in Surrey this July. In view of what you say about him I am wondering if I should do so.

The book of Grove stories I edited was promised for April (& I see it's advertised in Can Lit for April)² but has still not appeared. Meanwhile I am making good progress on the edition of his letters--should be ready by Fall. It's a good job he was a failure--when he had a year or two of success he became insufferably arrogant & looked down his nose at all other Canadian writers.

Give my love to Aviva & David. Hope we may get together one way or another soon.

Hugs,

Des

¹The annual meeting of the Royal Society of Canada was held 6-8 June 1971 at the Public Archives and National Library in Ottawa.

²Canadian Literature 48 (Spring, 1971) 71.
Dear Desmond,

At last I've done what I've been promising myself for nearly 30 yrs--given myself a vacation from poemizing. True, I did write one poem that Saturday Night took called "Some Canadian Birds in October," a satirical piece on several of my junior contemporaries who sniffed blood in the Laporte assassination and felt they had to get into the act before the R-ev-o-lu-tion passed them by. It's a pretty savage piece, even for me, but handsomely deserved. And I wrote a few more things very light. To wit:

Greek Poem
Gazing fondly
on your tight and perfect ass
I know for certain
I shall never become ancient

But if I do
it'll be your ass
I'll be looking for
on all the Greek boys.

I've had a wonderful time island-and-bed-hopping. Wish you were here, you old lecher.

Irving

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2Pierre Laporte (1921-70), Quebec Minister of Labour and Immigration, was kidnapped by members of the Front de Liberation de Quebec (FLQ) on 10 October 1970, and found murdered in the early hours of 18 October at a military air base outside Montreal.

be at a meeting. However, I hope that we can see you and Aviva either Sunday night or Monday night if you are free. If you judge that there is not time for us to get a reply from you before we leave for Las Vegas early next Thursday morning, perhaps you will leave a message for us at the Park Plaza. In any case we shall telephone you shortly after our arrival on Saturday night.

Hugs!
Des

enclosure: The Fiddlehead, 91 (Fall, 1971)

1See 615.6.


3Leonard Grove (b. 1930), son of Frederick Philip Grove and Catherine Wiens.

Dear Desmond,

Many warm thanks for your letter and The Fiddlehead. You must be a very proud father, seeing Peter's¹ and Michael's poems² in the issue. I know I'd be both happy and proud were they my sons who appeared together between the covers of one magazine. I congratulate heartily both you (O Mary too!) and them. Up with the Paceys. Excelsior. And God continue to bless.

We were delighted that you and Mary were able to spend the evening with us. Aviva worried a little that perhaps her supper wasn't up to her usual standard but I assured her that you, at any rate, had something else on your mind besides the meal. When are you coming our way again?

Last week the party was held for the Collected Poems.³ It was a moving occasion for me, maybe because it was held at Stong College where I was surrounded by my favourite human beings—students. Anyhow there were lots of them and President Slater⁴ made a brief complimentary speech which was followed by a beautiful eulogy by one of my former students⁵ and a witty speech by Barry Callaghan.⁶ The Master (or Mistress) of the College⁷ also said some nice things about my career and contribution to the University. Definitely, I'm swiftly sliding into Grand Old Manhood.

The Laytons leave this Thursday for a two-week holiday in, I hope, sunny Mexico. Maybe we'll be able to stretch it to three. Though we're off to a place called San Miguel d'Allende,⁸ I expect to roam around on my own once I've installed Aviva and David in some comfortable quarters. I'm seriously thinking of taking off next year (Sept 1972) for a tour of Latin America, and getting down to work on something big. Here at York I'm a sitting duck, telling everyone and his brother how to write and not finding the time to write myself. Screw that!

December 12, 1971

640.
Who's the knucklehead that reviewed Nail Polish in the Fiddlehead? Where in hell did he ever crawl out from? I've read silly things about my work before but his stuff—Migod!

Hugs,
Irving


1Peter Pacey, "TeaCup," "My Ladies Sleeping," Fiddlehead 91 (Fall 1971): 53-54.


4David Slater (b. 1922), former director of the Bank of Canada and former editor of Canadian Banker, was installed as President of York University on 30 October 1970.

5At the reception sponsored by Jack McClelland at York University to honour Layton's Collected Poems on 9 December 1971, one of the featured speakers was Kenneth Sherman, one of Layton's former students.

6Barry Callaghan also gave a congratulatory speech at the reception to honour Layton's Collected Poems.

7Virginia Rock, a Professor at York University was the first Master of Stong College.

8Municipality in Guanajuato state in central Mexico.


641.

December 20, 1971

Dear Irving,

I expect that you are now sunning yourself in sunny Mexico, while I am sitting freezing in my office—the temperature outside is 8° below zero & my radiators weren’t working when I got here.

Thanks for your kind remarks about Peter’s & Michael’s poems. Peter has so many other interests that I doubt whether he will ever be anything more than an amateur poetaster—but Michael has a furious concentration which may well propel him to greatness.

Please reassure Aviva about the quality of her supper that night. I think I should now reveal a matter which, for reasons of tact, we kept secret at the time. In your invitation, you did not mention supper, so Mary & I had supper in Murray’s prior to coming up to your place! So Aviva dear—it was not the quality of your food but the quantity in our stomachs that explained our poor appetites!
I'm glad the party for *Collected Poems* went so well. We received an invitation, but as we had so recently been in Toronto we didn't feel we could afford to go again—but we would have loved to have been there. That was good publicity in *Time*, too.¹

The chap who reviewed *Nail Polish* in the *Fiddlehead*² is a member of the English dept at St Thomas University here. He's an American, & a very conceited & pompous fellow.

That piece by Fulford you sent me is not a bad bit of writing about you.

I've been dipping into your *Collected Poems* from time to time and it's like entering a room filled with old friends—very heartwarming indeed.

As ever,

Des


"Christmas Eve 1971, Zihuatanejo"¹

Where were the men and where were the women robed in black
Where were the priests and nuns and the solemn processions
Now lights tear the jungle darkness, jukeboxes blare their songs:
Packed in the open air cinema are all the reverent ones

And only the lonely credulous children are in church
To hurrah His birthday and the marvellous manger story
Tableau'd upon the altar; perhaps two or three old women
Crossing themselves in corners, remembering the Babe's past glory

O magnificent fairy tale set down among piñatas,
Long-beaked hungering birds, white hotels, the pullulating poor:
I, Israel, give thanks this night knowing none shall be dead or worse
For no one is saved, no one is saved by Jesus anymore.

A wonderful 1972 to you, Mary, and all the Paceys.

Irving

Dear Desmond,

I hope you got my Xmas card. I've revised the poem somewhat and will send you the new version when it gets published.

Some more unseasonal thots on the unfortunate Fiddlehead reviewer—I’ve already forgotten his name! Must I credit him with originality or did he pick up the nasty trick of focussing on minor pieces—and even here his remarks are not too intelligent—from Dudek? How can anyone but an Englit prof concentrate all his fire on a two-line epigram and one or two other small pieces,1 but never say a word about such astonishing poems as "Shakespeare," "The Haunting," "Dionysius in Hampstead," "For Anna"?2 You tell me. Does this nitwit really believe that he has something to teach me about metrics or the shaping of a poem? There's more knowledge of craft in one of my haemorrhoids than there is in his whole head.

Really, what kind of vacuum does your university employ to sweep such rubbish in?

I’ve been writing poems like mad since I got here. So here's another.

Tide3

Lovers
and lesser men
have commented often
--several, cogently and well

On the half-choked
sputtering cry
the circumscribed tide makes
before it collapses and dies

I note only
what happens
to the bright refractions
of light

When the dashed water
lies momentarily low
slow-moving and still
on its dull, supporting, porous table.

Adios, Irving

PS Fondest good wishes to Mary. Irv

1Hunt criticizes the poems "July 21, 1969," "As Seen Through a Glass Darkly," and "Tragic Irony," but he also praises "Nail Polish," and "The End of the White Mouse."


Dear Desmond,

On the other side you’ll find a changed version of "Tide". Most of the changes are in the first verse to let the language give the feeling of the full roll and sweep of water before it breaks level and releases. I think "endlessly and persuasively" do that. And please don’t be outraged by "lesser men". I wanted the ‘s’ sound there, and an off-rhyme for ‘on’. In the second verse ‘anguished’ is a fine addition phonetically, and "hiss and final sigh" is true both to what I hear and what happens.

I hope the pun on TIDE didn’t escape you. How cd it--you’re so clever.

But if you’re so clever, will you explain like a good friend why reviewers in this country feel they must adopt a lecturing attitude towards me each time they deal with a book of mine? It began early in my career and still hasn’t stopped. Ah well, I suppose that is the lot of every genius and I must learn to bear my cross patiently. A hundred years from now all the twerps, assholes, and pedantic wiseacres will be forgotten dust but my poems will be around and loved everywhere. And so will the memory of me. "Lord forgive them for they know not what they say." I’ll inscribe that on my banner just below "Excelsior".

I’ve been working on the Xmas Eve poem and am finally--this AM--done with it. I’ve added a 4th stanza, and made several drastic changes. I think it’s first-rate now and will compare favourably with Hardy’s poem on the same subject. But mine is inevitably more complex and subtle. Sorry, that just popped out of me.

Hugs,
Irving

PS What really got me angry in the Fiddlehead review was the false and misleading slant it gave to my reading at the Univ of NB. It misleads because it misreads what happened that fabulous night. He makes it appear as if the defects in my poems somehow contributed to their obtaining the ovation they did. Has that pedantic jerk never heard of Wordsworth’s true poet who speaks directly to his hearers--and when he does they cannot do other but stop & listen?

TIDE

Lovers and poets
even lesser men
will go on and on
endlessly and persuasively

About the anguished
half-choked
sputtering cry
the circumscribed tide
makes—its hiss
and final sigh—
before it collapses
on the white sand
and dies

I note only
what happens
to the bright refractions
of light

when the dashed water
lies momentarily low,
slow-moving and still
on its dull, supporting, porous table.

Note how the last two lines reflect **aurally** and **visually** the waters' return. IPL.

PS We'll be leaving here on Jan 2nd. Fondest regards to Mary.

Irving

1"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34.


3Layton refers to a passage from Hunt's review:

Anyone who has heard Layton read has some notion of what it is: his poems are often meant to be heard, to be performed rather than contemplated. Therefore they must be translucent, the syntax uncomplicated, the images easy to unravel and immediate in their effect. Listeners, responding with other listeners to Layton's performance, are not likely to be conscious of matters like the presence or absence of internal tension in a poem, or its precision or slackening of observation. Seen in that light, there are few poems in this book which can be called unmitigated failures: even the most flaccid of the epigrams can be used to fill in a moment in a reading, to call forth a quick and transitory response, to bear their part in a performance. Hunt (104) [Layton's reading at UNB, see 601.5].

4"...in these Poems I propose to myself to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men...I wish to keep my reader in the company of flesh and blood, persuaded that by so doing I shall interest him."


Layton is here conflating Wordsworth's comments in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads with the Mariner's "buttonholing" of the wedding guest in Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," a key poem in that volume: "The wedding guest stood still...He cannot choose but hear." (lines 18 and 22)
Xmas Eve 1971, Zihuatanejo

Where were the men and where were the women robed in black
Where were the priests and nuns and the solemn processions
Now lights tear the jungle darkness, jukeboxes blare out their songs:
Packed in the open air cinema are all the reverent ones.

And only the lovely credulous children are in church
To hurrah His birthday and the marvelous manger story
Arrayed upon the altar; perhaps two or three old women
Crossing themselves in corners, remembering the Babe’s past glory.

The children’s eyes glisten as do the eyes of the candy-stuffed
Animals that hang from ceiling and lone and radiant star
But absent are prayer and song, the breathtaking enchantment:
For service a boy in frayed jeans casually sweeps the floor.

O sanguine fairytale, here replayed among pinatas
Long-beaked hungering birds, white hotels, the pullulating poor!
I too rejoice at the glad tidings. Now none shall be maimed or killed
For this sweet handsome doll saves no one. Come, let us adore.

Tide

Lovers
and lesser men
have gone on and on
endlessly and persuasively

About the anguished
half-choked
sputtering cry
the circumscribed tide
makes—its hiss
and final sigh—
before it collapses
on the white sand
and dies.

I note only
what happens
to the bright refractions
of light
When the dashed water
lies momentarily low
slow-moving and still
on its dull, supporting, porous table.

Let Me Not

Truly
my wife loves me
I think truly

and I love her
truly too
but
because she is
my wife
(why else?) for ever
tender, for ever true

I bring her poems
made from briars and thorns.

No Exit

The way his boy plucks them
off the Old Man's net
you'd think they were maybe scales,
flakes of mica
or sequins
on a washed-up tulle dress.

They're fish
--the tiniest I ever saw

And have just about stopped
squirming except for the obstinate few
still hanging on

Tell me
who's the Xenophon
of this Anabasis

Thalassa! Thalassa!

They lift and flutter
like coloured bits of paper,
some all the way back to the sea
--if the wind falls that way

For the long-beaked birds
shaped astonishingly
like miniature flying coffins.
I've written many more poems, but these seem to me the best of the lot. I've made another small change in the first verse of "Tide". Improves the rhythm, I think. These poems are my Xmas present to you and Mary.

Irving

1Lovers and Lesser Men 49.
2Lovers and Lesser Men 36.

Desmond, it shd be "solemn processions". Typist's error.

Irving

enclosure:ts "Xmas Eve 1971, Zihuatanejo"

January 10, 1972
Dear Irving,

Thanks very much for the postcard, letters and poems which you sent me from Mexico. These were all greatly appreciated. The poems are, as usual for you, excellent.

Will you be in Toronto the last weekend in January? I am making tentative plans to go up to Ottawa on Friday the 28th, and then come down to Toronto on Saturday evening the 29th and stay over until Sunday afternoon. I want to interview Barker Fairley1 about Grove on Sunday the 30th. If you and Aviva will be at home that Saturday night, I should love to see you and indeed stay overnight at your house if you have room for me. If you will not be at home, or if you will not have room for me, would you let me know as soon as possible so that I can make a reservation at the Park Plaza?

Yours sincerely,
Des Pacey

DP:D

1Barker Fairley (1887-1986) artist, editor, translator, Professor of German at the University of Toronto (1915-32; 36-57), a founder of the Canadian Forum (in 1920) and editor until 1932; a leading scholar of Goethe and Heine.

January 13, 1972
Dear Irving,

It now looks as if I shall have to defer my Toronto visit until the first or second weekend of February--February 5-6 or 12-13. Would either or both of these dates be acceptable to you?

Yours sincerely,
Des Pacey
York University
January 18, 1972

Dear Vice-Principal,

We’ll [be] glad to see you any time you can make it. Either of the weekends is okay. Just let me know which one so that I can lay away a couple of bottles of your favorite poison. Aviva will be waiting for you with open arms and I with bated breath.

Hugs,
Irving


January 19, 1972

Dear Desmond,

It now looks as if I’ll be in Montreal for the weekend of Feb 5—6. Is the following wknd still okay for you? Aviva and I would love to see your handsome, virile mug.

As ever,
Irving


January 24, [1972]

Dear Irving,

Your note of Jan 19 just in. Unfortunately I must come on Feb 5--the next weekend is now full up here. So sorry to miss you! To observe the proprieties, I’d better stay at the Park Plaza rather than at your place with Aviva (the flesh is frail!)--but if I have your permission I should love to see Aviva for an hour or two after I get in that Saturday night. Will that be okay or do you too profoundly mistrust this "old lecher with a love on every wind"?1

Liked your latest Mexican poem--particularly the macaws in the last verse.2

Now have three publishers interested in my "Paris anthology"--McGraw Hill, McClelland & S, & New Press (Dave Godfrey wrote today!).3

Am idly thinking of getting together my Collected Short Stories--now have almost 35 published stories.4 Several of them have recently been translated into German & have appeared in leading German magazines.5

Desperately busy with the University budget. Was at Bishop’s "Festival of the Arts" last weekend & "panelled" twice with Louis Dudek, George Johnston, & Tom Marshall.6

As ever,
Des

1W.B. Yeats, "The Tower;" see 138.4.

2"New Year’s Eve, Zihuatanejo," Lovers and Lesser Men 47.
February 7, 1972

Dear Irving and Aviva,

As I told Aviva over the telephone, our President has had to take sick leave again and so I am having to carry his duties on top of my own. Since this is the most hectic time of the university year, what with budgets, promotions, appointments, leaves, etc, I am sorry to say that I shall have to cancel my projected visit to Toronto. Perhaps I shall be able to come later on, in the spring or early summer.

Take good care of yourselves, and be pulling for me!

Yours sincerely,

Desmond Pacey

DP:lk

February 9, 1972

Dear Desmond,

Did you or did you not arrive in Toronto on the 4th or 5th? I left for Montreal on Thursday, and got back yesterday. Aviva and David didn’t accompany me after all. Why didn’t you phone? Aviva was home all day Saturday and would have been delighted to see you. Your note arrived at York the day before I took off for Montreal, so I didn’t see much purpose in answering it. But you must be kidding if you think you need my permission to see Aviva. Man, haven’t you heard of Women’s Lib? Aviva is a grown-up girl—or haven’t you noticed?—and decides for herself whom she wants to see or doesn’t. Though you’re an old lecher with a love in every wind, etc, your leer is far worse than your lust. If you went to bed with anyone but Mary you’d have a nervous breakdown. Ha, ha.

Hugs,

Irving
654. [ts]

February 17, 1972

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of February 9, which must have crossed with a letter of mine to you.

I did not, of course, come to Toronto on February 4th or 5th, and I shall not be coming this weekend. The president continues to be ill, and I am having to carry his duties on top of my own. The strain is nearly insupportable.

I hope it will be possible for me to come to Toronto in the spring or early summer—in any case I shall give you ample warning.

I deeply appreciate your friendship and that of Aviva, and I hope you will write and cheer me up occasionally during this critical period in my life.

Yours sincerely,

Des Pacey

February 23, 1972

655.

Dear Desmond,

So now the mystery is cleared up and I know why you didn’t make it to Toronto and Aviva’s waiting arms. A pity, we’d have had some drinks and laughs together. I’ll save them up for when you finally can put away your new burdens. Me? I can’t even imagine the strain of acting as the president of a university, though I can guess, especially when you tell me you have to carry on as vice-prexy as well. Okay, don’t take it too seriously—that’s my say. Don’t give yourself a hernia because if you do no one is going to rush forward to help you carry your balls...unless it’s one of your former students you fingerfucked in your imagination. She might even have some pretty assistants!

Just had two very attractive women in my office, one after the other. The first one was a luscious 18-year-old who came to interview me because she’s giving a seminar on my poems. The laugh is that she attends a Catholic school that’s run by nuns, and one of them, learning that she was coming to see me, told her to ask me why I put so much sex into my poems. I wonder: do I trouble her? I mean, the nun. Title for my next book—The Horny Nun. Anyway the girl kissed me before she left and said I was a ‘wonderful’ man. Of course, she let me know early enough that she had a boyfriend who was very jealous. My second visitor was somewhat older, 25 or 26, with a lovely smile and a wild look in her eyes. Her problem? She thought she was maybe insane. Having more imagination, sensitivity, and inherent decency than the people around her—she’d been writing poems ever since she was fifteen—she’d been picked to pieces by the vultures, male and female, in her family and circle of friends. God, what a world. Only the vicious and lousy can survive. I gave her what comfort and strength I could, but talking to her and others like her, I sometimes begin to feel I’m a Miss Lonelyhearts, aching to help and quite powerless. Ah well, there are always the lines of the poets
to cheer me up. Thank heaven I'm not one of these but belong with "the inconsoleable ones." Keep well and write when you can.

Hugs,
Irving

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1 Misdated January 23; corrected in Pacey's hand.

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March 9, 1972

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your recent letter—which you dated Jan 23 but must have been written Feb 23. It came just as I was about to leave for a week—Feb 28 to March 6—in Cambridge, England. I went over with my eldest daughter, Mary Ann, for her PhD oral held on Saturday March 4 from 11:30 to 1 o'clock in Magdalen College. She & I had a wonderful week together, studying in the University library, lunching & dining with friends, & going for long walks down the Cam. It was a week we shall always remember. Mary Ann found the oral examiners very formal & severe, but from what she told me of her answers to their questions I am sure she did brilliantly.

The spring had arrived in Cambridge—crocuses out in full glory on the Backs, snowdrops in the Trinity Fellows' Garden, rose bushes in leaf, etc.

Our president has now left for a month in Florida to convalesce, so I am still doing the two jobs. I really needed that week off—the pace is killing!

Am collecting my stories together for Dave Godfrey & am being awarded the Lorne Pierce Gold Medal by the Royal Society this June!!

Love to you & Aviva,
Des

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2 See 650.

3 Pacey was awarded the Lorne Pierce Medal June 15th at the 1972 Annual Meeting of the Royal Society of Canada at Memorial University in Saint John's.

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March 14, 1972

Dear Irving,

I enclose a sheet from the university newspaper containing my son Michael's latest poems.

If you, like them, I am sure he would appreciate a word of encouragement from you.
How are things? I am still terribly busy, as the President is out for at least another month, but I’m surviving.

Love to Aviva!

As ever,

Des


March 17, 1972

Dear Michael,

Your dad sent me the Brunswickan and I was delighted to see your spread of poems in it. I’ve read them several times and enjoyed them immensely, my enjoyment increasing with each reading. You’ve certainly gained altitude very fast and come out of the clouds with assurance and power. I’m impressed tremendously by the maturity of thought and feeling in these poems, by their irony and dissatisfaction.

Beyond, the charcoal limbs of rising pines
rise into the air like ribs of fish

That’s fine. I wish I had written those lines. Or these:

And prunes her picture in the glass
scurrying back to the gathered faces

Joking yokels, hands jigging, talk
and whistle at her walking form

You’re really looking at things, seeing them with the starkness and clarity of the true poet. And the sounds you make are good, very good. Now spread your wings and make for the sun.

Cheers,

Irving


3Pacey, "Clay Pedestals," (lines 10-11).
Dear Desmond,

Your son’s poems are really very good. I’m impressed by their tone of maturity as well as the craft I see he’s put into them. How old is Michael? He’s the younger son, isn’t he, the one who asked me for a contribution to some kind of fund or other? Red-haired and freckled? Anyhow, his appearance doesn’t matter though I recall being much taken by it. What matters is whether he’s swallowed the holy firewater and I think he has.

I spoke to Max last night—I’m off to Montreal in ½ hr --and he told me he’d written several poems & short stories. And he added, "They’re really good, Dad." Since Max isn’t the boastful sort like his father, I think they probably are. I’ll be seeing him this afternoon, so I’ll be reading them and discussing them with him. He’s also been working on his 2nd novel. Naomi gave her first concert in San Francisco about a month ago. Classical guitarist, that’s my girl. Well, Betty was present, and she wrote me a very enthusiastic account of the evening which, allowing for some maternal exaggeration, still adds up to something impressive. Given my daughter’s iron-willed determination (I take her talent for granted) I think one day she’s going to be up there among the stars. Music is in her gentle soul, and music is her whole life. I do not know how I ever spawned her, there are so many disharmonies in my own soul. Dissonances that often terrify me. Ah, well—to each his own way to heaven.

When are you coming this way again, speaking of heaven? Next month I’m out of the pressure cooker. Keep well, for Aviva and I, we love you.

Best wishes,
Irving

1Layton is thinking of Peter Pacey and his Kindness Club fund (see 291.2).

2Max Layton has published one novel; see 511.3.

Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter of March 18. I am glad you liked Michael’s poems, and delighted to hear of your children’s achievements. Yes, Michael is my youngest son—he is 18 & a freshman at UNB who plans to do honours in Philosophy & English. He is already terrifically erudite—he has read far more for his years than I had.

I don’t know when I’ll be coming your way. I was invited to a meeting in Toronto on March 18, but I couldn’t make it because of various heavy commitments I had here. The president is still off duty, so I am still carrying the double load. Moreover, he’s resigned effective June 30, so presumably I shall either be president or acting president next year—no end in sight, in other words.
Needless to say, I don’t get much time for writing, but I am still doing some work on the Grove Letters, which I hope to send to the U of T Press this summer, and I have gathered together all my short stories for Dave Godfrey, who suggested a possible collected edition to be published by his New Press. My "Paris Anthology", as I probably told you, is now to be jointly published by McGraw Hill & the Paris publishers, & should be out this fall.

Did Aviva get the Victoria job, or any other? My daughter Mary Ann, on a sessional appointment at Acadia this year, has still nothing for next year in spite of her Cambridge PhD. It’s a desperate time for the kids, even worse than the thirties & early forties. The outlook for PhD’s is so bad that my son Peter has decided to stop at the MA & teach High School for a few years until the situation clears up. Married with a small child, he doesn’t feel like skrimping for 3 more years on a PhD programme when there may be no job at the end of it anyway.

What are your plans for the summer? My situation is so unsettled re the presidency etc that I have as yet made no plans at all. I’d like to go to Europe again for a month, but can’t count on it at this stage. I may have to settle for a series of brief sorties to nearby places like PEI & Cape Breton, with returns to the university at short intervals to keep the routine business under control.

At least I’ve won one major battle—our Higher Education Commission gave us a draft report which would have slightly cut our grant for next year rather than increased it, but I fought them tooth & nail & managed to end up with a 14% increase, probably the best of any university in Canada! Three years ago I would never have believed that I could manage a budget of over $21 million, but by now I don’t mind it at all!

Give my love to Aviva & accept your own due share.

As ever,
Des

120 St Clements Ave
Toronto, Ont
April 6, 1972

Dear Desmond,

Too bad you couldn’t make the March 18th meeting in Toronto. It’s been too long since we saw you, and Aviva and I would have been happy to have you with us for the weekend. What use are Aviva’s charms if Wordsworth’s Stern Daughter has you in her embrace—or should I say clutch? I guess, though, dispensing a $21 million budget has its attractions—$21 million, really? I wouldn’t know what to do with a budget of 21 dollars. Migod, you startle me. You couldn’t steer a million my way, could you, so that no one would notice it? I promise not to spend it unwisely, not a penny of it. All of it would go for girls, the prettiest ones I could find, and I’d devote the rest of my life to
finding them. Girls, cognac, my favorite brand of cigars--man, what an alluring dream. I'd hump, drink and puff away and do nothing else--well, write an occasional poem to let the world know that happiness is still possible in it--till they carted me off to the boneyard.

No, Aviva didn’t get the Victoria job. A pity because she’s a crackerjack teacher, almost as good as I am. She’s got a tutorial at York, and her students were licking their fingers with her all through the year. She’s done brilliantly in all her courses, straight A’s and all that sort of thing. I’ve read some of the papers she wrote this year--they’re magnificent! One on Saul Bellow’s The Victim in particular, and another one just as good on Patrick White’s The Vivisector. The things Aviva can find in a novel--you wouldn’t believe it! Along with that goes a tremendous enthusiasm for fiction which seems to infect all her students. I’m hoping some unblinkered chairman at York will recognize her talents and find an outlet for them. It would be a shame if they go unused.

Did Michael receive the letter I sent him c/o your office? I hope he did, because I was truly impressed by several of his poems. I also included along with the letter a copy of Saturday Night with an article in it by Barry Callaghan on my Collected Poems. What did you think of it? I sent off a letter which Bob Fulford will be publishing in next month’s issue. It’s a pretty hard-hitting piece in my best polemical style. This lion might be aging but he’s still got his teeth and roars as fiercely as he ever did when anyone tries to twist his tail. They can keep the "mellowing" shit for some other guy. I’m not yet ready to be dumped on Madame’s lap and petted into senile amiability. Nossir!

Mc & S are definitely bringing out the Selected Prose of Irving Layton this Fall. Seymour Mayne has collated the material and it makes quite an impressive book. It will contain 3 or 4 of my short stories, most of the Forewords and Intros I’ve written over the years, reviews and articles, as well as a selection from my vast correspondence. He might want to see the collection you have. One day my Love Letters will be published but by then I hope to be safely dead and buried. Love to Mary and best regards to Peter and Michael.

Hugs,
Irving

PS Two poems by Max have been taken by Impulse, and he and I will be appearing in the same issue.

1"Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!" line 1


Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter to Michael & your letter to me of April 6. Your letter to Michael was a masterpiece of its kind and did wonders for his morale. He has written several new poems since, & the second issue of his magazine Urchin is about to appear.

Incidentally, I suppose you have seen the first issue of the Journal of Canadian Fiction. What did you think of it? I was rather annoyed by the number of typographical errors that had crept into it, but otherwise I felt it was a very handsome product, full of interesting stuff.

Sorry to hear Aviva didn’t get the Victoria job. I suppose they have given it to some desiccated pedant who will bore the students to death. If university administrators want to turn the students on they should appoint beautiful girls with juice in their panties—like your wife & my daughters. Poor Mary Ann has no prospects for next year at all now, & is close to a nervous breakdown.

You ask about Barry Callaghan’s article in Saturday Night. Actually, Michael has been so possessive with regard to that package from you that I have not even seen the article. I’ll ask him at lunch time to let me have a look at it.

Did you see Louis Dudek’s attack on Woodcock & me in The Golden Dog? A very unfair piece—deliberately selective to give a false impression—and I’ve written a rejoinder for the next issue which will reveal his double-dealing in all its naked dishonesty. Louis is becoming paranoiac—he feels he is unduly neglected, so he’s determined to kick everyone who does get any praise. I can quite see now how the break with you came about—sheer envy, to put it bluntly.

Glad to hear McC & S are bringing out your selected prose. I’ll be looking forward to it, & I shall be glad to make a few of the letters to me available if they wish.

I’m awaiting word from Godfrey about a collected edition of my stories. He wrote & asked for them, & I sent them to him about six weeks ago but so far have had no word. I doubt whether he’ll regard them as sufficiently fashionable—I’m resigned to the fact, or at least the probability, that I shall have to wait (in some scholar’s heaven) for posterity to do justice to my stories. The best
of them catch the rhythms of Ontario rural life as no one else—not even Knister or Grove—has caught them. Stories like "Silo" and "That Day in the Bush" are classics of their kind—but only I have the sensitivity to realize it!

The President has just arrived back, looking awful (that yellow colour cancer victims get) but out of sheer courage coming to the office a couple of hours each day & giving me a hand. It relieves the pressure on me a bit, but its an agonizing experience to watch a strong man slowly die. His hope is to survive until our graduation exercises & to give out degrees to his two daughters, who happen to be in the class of '72. His courage makes me marvel—I feel sure that if I were in his condition I would hide from the world in terror.

Love to Aviva—& to yourself.

As ever,
Des

PS Did I tell you I am to get the Lorne Pierce Medal from the Royal Society this year?

1Edited by David Adams Richards, Brian Bartlett and Michael Pacey, Urchin was intended as a literary quarterly but only two issues appeared—in the winter and spring of 1972.

2The Journal of Canadian Fiction, a periodical devoted to fiction and criticism, was founded and edited in Fredericton by David Arnason and John Moss; since issue 11.3 (Summer 1973), the literary magazine has been published in Montreal.


5The third of the four sections which comprise Engagements is titled "Assorted Letters and Vituperations," (149—201); it contains letters to the editors of various periodicals and the "Open Letter to Louis Dudek" (see 281.3) but does not contain any of Layton's personal correspondence.

663.

Dear Desmond,

Some great news. Caedmon wants to slot me in between Pound and Dylan Thomas.1 I've already had two meetings with their representatives in Toronto; this Tuesday we're to sign the contract, and I'm hoping to receive a fat advance. I've already selected the poems for the recording, about thirty of the most readable and best known ones—"The Birth of Tragedy,"2 "The Predator,"3 etc. There's a very attractive girl in the firm who's in all the negotiations that had heard of me but had never read a single line I'd written. She went out and bought the "monumental" Collected Poems; now she describes herself as an undying fan of mine. I hope she doesn't begin to talk like the woman in my poem "Mixed Metaphors."4 Women's praise embarrasses me; anyhow makes me suspicious: I don't know whether they're saying nice things about my poems or my prick.
Last Wednesday I handed John Newlove the mss of my next book. *Engagements: Selected Prose of Irving Layton.* It’s made up of my forewords, intros, short stories, reviews—the one I wrote on your *Picnic and Other Short Stories* is in it—and some of my public correspondence, assorted letters & vituperation I call it, including my "Open Letter to Louis Dudek." Now I’ve got to write a short preface for the book, explaining what noble impulse possessed me to bring it out. Jack McC has given me a firm promise to have the book out this Fall. I’ve promised him another volume of poems for next spring.

We’re still having problems with finding a house in Toronto. There are not many houses on sale, and those there are, Aviva turns her nose up at. Not that I reproach her. If we’re going to buy a house to live in, it’s got to be one that will make us feel welcome and give us continuous pleasure. It must have a garden at the back where I can sit and see the birds shit.

Aviva is all through with her work. For next year she’s got a tutorial as well as an assistantship lined up, so she’ll be earning some bread. She has only one more course to do, and she’ll most likely register in Eli’s graduate course.

Yassu,
Irving

PS If I can get my housing problem solved I’ll be off to Greece sometime in May.

Seymour Mayne has gotten his doctorate, with his thesis on my work. Strange, to think he was once my pupil in Herzliah.

Love to Mary. Glad to hear my brief letter to Michael was a spur.

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5Layton, rev. of *The Picnic* by Desmond Pacey, *Engagements* 41-44.


7Layton, "Preface," *Engagements* x-xvi

8Layton, *Lovers and Lesser Men*

9E.W. ("Eli") Mandel was a Professor of English at York University.

Dear Irving,

Congratulations on the Caedmon recording contract—and of course there would be an attractive girl mixed up in the negotiations somewhere. I suppose your sexual prowess & reputation are such that rather than the girl having to go to bed with you to earn a reward, the reverse operation is expected! Are you still up to it?

I’m glad to hear about the prose book, too, & egotistically, particularly glad that it’s to contain the review of The Picnic. I’ve forgotten what you said in that—I hope it wasn’t too harsh a critique.

Why are you giving up your present home in Toronto? Is it too small, too shabby, or what?

I’m to be in Toronto Nov 2-3 to read a paper at a conference on Editorial Problems—so I should see you then if not before.

Glad to hear Aviva has some work for next year. Peter now has a job—teaching senior English at Fredericton High School—but Mary Ann’s job at Acadia is over & so far she has found nothing at all for next year. Do you know of anything that a very attractive young lady of 27 with a Cambridge PhD could do in Toronto? I mean that quite seriously—if you have any useful contacts, please use them!

Still no definite plans for the summer because of the uncertainty re the presidency etc. I am scheduled to go to Saint John’s Newfld June 4-6 to pick up my Lorne Pierce Gold Medal from the Royal Society, & if the present president is fit at all to carry on his duties until June 30 (the formal date of his resignation) I might go on to Europe for the rest of that month & come back to take up the reins on July 1. But I shall probably only be acting president for at least the first few months—in these days selection committees go through all kinds of hoops before they come up with any formal appointment. Everyone (including the premier of the province) assures me that I am a shoo-in for the job—but there’s many a slip...3

Love to Aviva & all the best to yourself.

As ever,

Des


2Richard Hatfield (1931-91), Premier of New Brunswick, November 1970 to October 1987; appointed to the Senate, 7 September 1990.

3"There is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." Palladas, in the Greek Anthology ed. J.W. Mackail (London, New York: Longmans, Green, 1906), Book X, epigram 32.
Dear Desmond,

I’ve just returned from Montreal where I looked up some friends and skirts. Both activities gave me immense pleasure. Skirts going up and pantyhose coming down—that’s the only kind of dialectics I’m interested in nowadays. Alas, property values are coming down too, and that doesn’t please me at all. I’ve got my house in Hampstead for sale—no buyers as yet. Luckily my present tenant has asked for a 6 month’s extension of the lease, so I shan’t be out of pocket while trying to sell it. But things suddenly took a turn for the better because yesterday I put a bid in for a house in Toronto and my offer was accepted. It’s a lovely place, a house that’s spacious and one you can hear chuckling to itself. Moreover, it’s right next door to the one we’re occupying presently. Isn’t that a laugh? Aviva and I were knocking ourselves out looking at houses in every part of the city, and here was this pearl right under our noses. True, its owner only decided one week ago he wanted to sell but we mightn’t have heard of it hadn’t my son learned from a confabulation with our neighbour that he was thinking of putting it up for sale. Had he done so, it would have been snapped up before I could have shouted a neighbourly ‘How d’y do?’ I got the place for a reasonable figure—I’m sure he might have asked and rec’d from $3000-5000 more than the price he sold it to me for.

While in Montreal I wrote two poems and put the finishing touches to the "Foreword" for Engagements. The latter is a good summary of the development of my political and literary thinking over the past three decades. It will raise a couple of howls but I’m past caring, if I ever did care, on whose toes I step. I’m including my "Open Letter to Louis Dudek" in the book, which now appears to me even more clairvoyant than when it first appeared in Cataract ten years ago. Although there are about a score of people who’ll squirm when they discover themselves between the covers of Engagements—but what the hell, it’s a small price to pay for immortality.

I’m leaving Toronto next week. I intend to spend a few more days in Montreal before taking off for Athens on June 5th. I’m going alone since Aviva has to stay until David is through with school. I expect to do some island-hopping before I settle down. When I do, I shall write to tell you where I am.

Have yourself a wonderful summer. Love to Mary.

Best luck,
Irving

PS The teaching situation here is as hopeless as it is everywhere else. We’ve rec’d about 300 apps for the only post that was offered. I hear that Sir George Williams is looking for a Can Lit specialist. Would Mary Ann be interested? If so, let her phone Howard Fink, Dept of English. She can mention my name.
Dear Irving,

Thanks a lot for your letter of May 24 & the enclosed poems.

Dealing first with your two postscripts--I have been officially appointed Acting President now, while the Joint Selection Committee continues its work, and everyone seems to take for granted that I will be confirmed in the post within the next few weeks.

Mary Ann did apply for the Can Lit position at Sir GW, but has had no reply. She was interviewed yesterday at Lennoxville for a job at Champlain College, the CGEP which now occupies most of the Bishop’s Univ buildings, & she was offered the job.¹ She hopes to defer her decision for a few days since the U of Notre Dame at Nelson BC is also showing strong interest in her.

I believe I told you previously that Peter has accepted a job teaching senior English at Fredericton High School (a huge school, by the way, with over 3,000 students).

Enjoyed your remarks about looking up skirts, pantyhose coming down etc, since I’m still an old lecher at heart.

Glad to hear you’ve found a house to suit you, & I look forward to your prose book.

I’m afraid you’ll have left Toronto before this reaches you, but perhaps Aviva will forward it.

I leave in two hours for St. John’s, Newf’d, where I’m to receive the Lorne Pierce Medal from the Royal Society. That’s an award I’ve always hoped to win eventually, & I’m very pleased.

Still no word re the stories from Dave Godfrey. He seems to be a remarkably poor correspondent. Did I tell you I wrote a new story² recently--set at Chaucer’s mill (The Reeve’s Tale³) near Grantchester?

I hope you have a good summer & that we shall be able to get together when I come to Toronto to give my lecture on Nov 2.

I expect you will have a whole batch of new poems to show me & that the book of prose will be out by then.

All the best,

As ever, Des

June 3, 1972

¹See 282.3.

²Howard Fink (b. 1934), Professor of English, Sir George Williams University (1964-present), co-author (with John Jackson) of All the Birght Company (1987).
Dear Desmond,

Since coming here I've had such an outpouring of poems that I can recall nothing like it. Only at the beginning, way back in the early 50's did anything similar to what I'm experiencing now take place. I've written--so help me God--23 poems in little over a week, and long sockdolagers too, not skinny constipated ones à la Creeley.1 About five or six are certainly among the best things I've ever written. You'll be seeing them in Tamarack Review.2 Do you know there's a statue to Rupert Brooke in Skyros and that his tomb is here?3 I went up to see them--they're atop a very steep climb--and afterwards wrote a poem for him.4 It's a fine piece, and I'm very pleased with it. And I've also written a long poem (60 lines) for Ovid that remarkably recreates that poet's tones and temperament.5 It was easy. I am he!

Irving

1Robert Creeley; see 154.5.

2Tamarack Review ceased publication temporarily with issue 59 which appeared at the end of 1971; #60 did not appear until October 1973. Layton's next appearance was in #68 (Spring 1976).

3Brooke died of dysentery and blood poisoning aboard ship off the island of Skyros on 23 April 1915, on his way to the Gallipoli campaign in the Dardanelles; he was buried in an olive grove on Skyros.


all Canadian universities——on Nov 2 I go on to London where I give a paper at a Can Lit conference there——on Nov 3 I return to Toronto & give a paper at a U of T conference on Editing Canadian Texts on the morning of Nov 4. I return to Fred'n on Sunday the 5th. As you see, it is a pretty hectic schedule, but I hope to see you at some point, so try & keep open an evening——say that of October 31.

The second purpose of this letter is to bring you up to date on my news, which this time is a strange mixture of good & bad, with the bad I suppose predominating. The summer started promisingly with a trip in early June to Newfoundland where I had the proudest moment of my life when I was presented with the Lorne Pierce Gold Medal. Almost immediately after getting back from that trip, however, I had a slight rectal haemorrhage, saw my doctor, & found I had a small tumour on the rectum which he thought was benign. I went into hospital on June 20 for the minor operation, expecting to be out in four or five days. I emerged therefrom six weeks & three operations later! The little tumour proved to be cancerous, so I had to have a major operation to remove the rectum & the lower colon. After that operation, complications set in & I had to have a third operation to remove "adhesions". I am glad to say, however, that once I got out of hospital on August 2nd I began to make a very rapid recovery. Apparently the initial bleeding was a blessing in disguise, as it permitted early diagnosis & quick surgery——& there had been no spreading to any other tissues or organs. The doctor says he caught it at Stage One & I should be as vigorous as ever fifteen years from now. I have since learned of so many people who have had this same operation & have survived for long periods——e.g. Elizabeth Taylor, Loretta Young, the Bishop of Leicester, a dean at Dalhousie, etc etc. I shall always have a disability as far as bowel elimination is concerned——I have to wear a plastic bag around my "stoma", & it can be embarrassing in certain circumstances. For example, it spoils my image as a Lothario! Indeed the doctor warned me that I should almost certainly be impotent as a result of the operation, as the nerves in that area would be damaged. I am glad to say this has not proved to be so, though my sexual performances are definitely far below their former standard——but I can do it!

Of course the operation came just as I was to become Acting President officially——and that was very embarrassing too. They had to call a special meeting of the Board, defer my Acting Presidency until September 15 etc etc.

Anyway, to cut a long story short, I was back in my office and in unofficial command by August 5 (3 days after getting out of hospital) & assumed the Acting Presidency officially on Sept 15. There is what is expected to be a final meeting of the Selection Committee tomorrow night——I am told I am the only candidate who has been chosen for interview. So unless some last minute hitch develops——as it may, of course——I should be confirmed in office very soon.
When we meet I can tell you more of my reactions to all these crises. I was very low at certain moments, but on the whole I was surprised at my own reserves of strength, both physical & spiritual. Mary & the children of course were great supports throughout--well over 75% of the faculty & staff of the university wrote me personal letters of encouragement--literally hundreds!

Love,
Des


November 14, 1972
Mr & Mrs Irving Layton
122 St Clements Avenue
Toronto, Ontario

Dear Aviva and Irving,

I write to thank you for your kind hospitality to Mary & me during our recent visit to Toronto. It was delightful to see you both again and to enjoy such a good evening of good talk and laughter.

I'm sorry we did not get to see you again on the Saturday night, but by that time I was really exhausted from my week of conferences and lectures and wanted only to go to bed early.

I have read Irving's book of prose and have found it most stimulating. You certainly are a formidable adversary and a powerful friend!

Miriam Waddington was here last night reading her poetry1 and we spent some time with her afterwards at a party at Fred Cogswell's. I was surprised by how well Miriam read & spoke--she really did develop a fine rapport with her audience. At one point she told an anecdote about my being at her house and praising Irving's poetry so warmly that she was jealous--and then damning one of her own poems with faint praise. She told the story good-naturedly, however, and seems to have forgiven me for my hostile review of her Say Yes.2 She also seems to be a much happier and less self-pitying person than she used to be.

All the best for now, and I sincerely hope we may meet again soon.

Yours sincerely,
Desmond Pacey
Acting President

DP/s

1 Miriam Waddington, poetry reading, University of New Brunswick, 13 November 1972.
Dear Desmond,

Your letter was here when I got back from Vancouver where I gave readings at UBC\(^1\) and Simon Fraser.\(^2\) Despite its typed formality and stilted tone (did you dictate it and was your sec too obtuse to take the starch out?) I was glad to get news of you. Aviva and I were very happy to see you and Mary and relieved to find you in such good spirits. One would never suspect that you had undergone such severe trials—you were your familiar cheerful self, full of bounce and self-assurance and with that hearty maleness everything about you exudes. What further amazed me and fills me with admiration is the way you keep on with undiminished vigour and zest. You’re a bloody inspiration, that’s wot y’are!

Yes, Miriam W seems to be in her post-menopausal phase. Gone forever her frowns and kvetches;\(^3\) a sweetness that was never noticeable before seems to have surfaced and settled on her face and demeanor. There was always a coldness—largely of her own making—between us, but that’s gone. The walls have come tumbling down, and she always has a kiss and a warm hug for me whenever we meet. I must say I wholeheartedly welcome the change, since I’ve no heart for fighting with women, only for fucking them. Ah, if Miriam were a palatable chick of 20, the age I relish them best, what imperishable lyrics we’d inspire each other to write.

I’m glad you like Engagements. There was a good review of it in the Globe and Mail,\(^4\) and a rather silly one by Robert Fulford in the Toronto Star.\(^5\) I’ve just about given up on journalists, their profession tends to make them superficial, to see issues, but never essences. The poor gob lumbers around the book as if he were a constipated rhinoceros, dropping great heavy farts simply to let everyone know he’s around. He’s picked up on the Dudekian notion—15 yrs later—that I’m a monstrous egotist\(^6\) and sees the articles, etc as expressions of my appalling egomania. He concedes the book is interesting nevertheless and confesses that he couldn’t stop himself from turning the pages to see what comes next—still and all (my observation) he’d be a whole lot happier if I were a pallid mediocrity like himself with opinions but with no burning convictions about life and poetry. What a happy haven Canada is for clerks like himself. Scrofula take them!

Keep well, Desmond, and take good care of yourself. Aviva and I hope you’ll be in Toronto again very soon and able to spend more time with us. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving
November 23, 1972

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of "Sunday". I apologize for sending you the dictated letter—I did it under the pressure of business.

I’m glad to hear that your relationship with Miriam W has also warmed up—at her best she is a very warm human being, but at her worst she is an insufferable martyr.

Since I don’t read the Toronto papers I haven’t seen the reviews you mention. Have you a spare copy of any of them?

Michael gave a reading of his poems last night—along with his two co-editors of Urchin—and I was very impressed with the progress he is making as a poet. He now has a recognizable poetic world of his own—strangely enough its affiliations seem to be with Verlaine & Mallarmé and the French impressionist painters: delicate, subtle, dream-laden yet precise.

Still further delays about the presidency—some member of the selection committee held out for bringing in at least one of the 179 outside candidates—so he is to come this Sunday. The theory is that there should be at least one outsider against whom I can be measured. The one chosen is a top scientist from Ottawa—Director of Environmental Studies or some damn thing! If they turn me down now I’ll be dealt a blow from which I shall never recover! Love to Aviva!

As ever, Des

1 David Adams Richards, Brian Bartlett, Michael Pacey, poetry reading, University of New Brunswick, 22 Nov. 1972.
672. November 24, 1972

Dear Irving,

In my earlier letter, I now realize, I made the dreadful mistake of ignoring your enclosed poems—for the simple reason that they had got separated from your letter on my desk. I have just now come upon them in the pile of paper, & hasten to express my gratitude for them.

I particularly like "Stella", which is an excellent character study and a profound comment on the human condition. "The Cockroach" is a much slighter poem, but it is good fun (& the humour has a nicely acid edge to it). "Farewell" has one very good line—"resurrected after the third lay"—but on the whole I find it somewhat stereotyped.

Now I’ll sit back & wait for the wrath of the mighty Layton to descend upon me! If you are too rough on me I’ll slink away into the arms of your lovely wife and find comfort where you have so often sought it.

As ever,
Des

673. December 10, 1972

Dear Desmond,

The fancy stationery went with the house, about the only commendable thing in it. By now the place is habitable, indeed quite lovely. I’m wild about it, perhaps because it’s almost entirely my own creation, my dream of brick and plaster and glass fixed in space and palpable. My study, with large windows on three sides of it, lets in the light and the feel of the weather. I live surrounded by treetops, like a wise old owl and I have my nest among them, and the next time we meet don’t be surprised if I greet you with a Tu whit...tu whoo! Adjoining my study, is the library, all the walls lined with book-filled shelves. Gawd, where did I amass all those books? Truly I must have been a bibliomaniac. If I live another 100 years, and spend 8 hours of each day reading, I’d never get through them all. Still, it gives me a warm feeling to see them all neatly arranged in their places, many of them old friends from way back. One of the first books I ever bought was Keats’ Poems. I was fourteen and used to sign myself Irving Lazarre¹, so that I could indite the following couplet:

From near or far
You have the love of Irving Lazarre.

Now the couplet runs:

My name is Irving Layton,
Always lovin’, never hatin’.

Not true, of course, but who but an ass or a pedant expects truth from a poet.
I'm glad you like the "Stella" poem. I think it's one of the best things I've done in recent years. I wrote it this summer, and another short 3-line poem "Stella Iannou" after she ended her life by pouring kerosene over herself and put a match to herself. Both poems have been taken by the Queen's Quarterly and will be in the winter issue, along with a 3rd poem, "Antipodeans". I saw John Newlove and he thinks Lovers And Lesser Men ought to be in the bookstores by the middle of January. I hope so. It wd be nice returning from Mexico to an advance copy of the book. We're leaving next Saturday for Zihuatanajo, and we'll be returning on Jan 8th. I'll drop you a card from there, once we're settled. Maybe a new poem. I'm eagerly looking forward to the much-needed, much-deserved (yah, I think so!) rest, browning my pot and buttocks under my beloved sun.

Aviva's mood has changed, thank heavens. She's almost as enthusiastic about the house as I am though she's somewhat miffed that it's my creation, not hers. Any news about the Presidency? I hope you get it, if that's what you want. Aviva sends her warmest love, and wants to know when you're coming this way again. Love to Mary.

Yassu,
Irving

1See 224.3.


December 18, 1972.

Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of December 10. I'm glad to hear that both you and Aviva are now enjoying your house.

I hope you enjoy your holiday in Mexico.

I am probably at the lowest point in morale that I have ever been. About ten days or so ago rumours began to fly about the campus to the effect that I was to be ditched for the presidency in favour of a young outsider. At first I refused to believe. The faculty got up a petition to block the outsider & in two days obtained the signatures of over two thirds of the staff. In view of what the Joint Nominating Committee had told me--"When we put your name forward..."--I still clung to my illusions. Then last Tuesday night the Committee made its report to the Joint Meeting of Senate & Board--& they had ditched me in favour of Dr John Anderson, who was an assistant professor here from 1958-63 & is now Director General of Research & Devt for the Dept of the Environment in Ottawa. The faculty members of the Senate voted to reject the nomination in favour of me--but the Board of Governors overruled them & Anderson is in! It was a right-wing coup, designed to put the faculty in its place. I was seen as a liberal, a
proponent of "faculty power"--- & shunted aside. It was my first experience of naked political manoeuvring, & I'm still shaken by it. I have managed to maintain my sang-froid\(^1\) in public--- I even cracked a joke at the Joint Meeting about now being able to write a novel that will out-snow Snow\(^2\)--- but privately I am devastated. I have worked my guts out for this university for so long--- only to be kicked in the teeth by the Board of Governors, made up of wealthy brewers & businessmen, mainly from the city of Saint John!

Perhaps in the long run it will turn out for the best--- but in the short run it's the worst thing that has happened to me since I lost the Rhodes Scholarship to Alan Jarvis by a whisker back in 1937.\(^3\)

Love (& kisses to Aviva),
Des

---

1French: composure, self-control.

2C.P. Snow (1905-80), English novelist who took as his major theme the uses and abuses of power in government, business, the university, and in personal relationships; author of The Masters (1951) and Corridors of Power (1964).

3Alan Jarvis (see 272.7) won the Rhodes Scholarship for Ontario in 1938.

675.[ppc] Zihuatanejo, Mexico.
December 24, 1972.

Dear Desmond,

It's been a hectic week, what with Eastern\(^1\) losing our baggage and me having more than a touch of Montezuma's Revenge, but things are finally sorting out. We've a large comfortable room right on the beach and the tide has many voices for me. If the sun works its usual magic, I'll write some poems. I found Bowra's Sophoclean Tragedy\(^2\) in a small shop run by an expatriate American. Like him,\(^3\) I too am concerned with human conduct.

Hugs,
Irving

PS Love to Mary. My warmest wishes for an exciting and very good new year for you and yours.
Aviva sends her love.
xxxxx from Aviva

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1Eastern Airlines.


3Sophocles.
Dear Desmond,

Reading a small paperback on Frost—poems, comments, snippets of biography. May providence save me—I think it has—from growing old like him. He’s a cold, shambling, deceitful man—smug even about his vices and defects. The 'complexity' in his poems and personality is merely evasiveness, the prismatic glints of cowardice. Fat-assed hermaphrodites like Frost and Yeats—age revealed their sourness (excuse me, toughness, yeh yeh)—makes one almost despise poetry. Nietzsche has made such alte cackers (Yiddishism) forever distasteful to me. They have the smell of unwashed monks. Disgusting, self-conscious dirty old men.

Poets do well to die young—unless they’re like Goethe and myself.

Yrs,
Irving

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2 Yiddish: old or prematurely old people, "old coots."

3 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) lived to a great age continuing to change and develop, as witnessed by Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre (1821), his paean to social and technological progress, and Part Two of his masterwork Faust (1832).

---

Harry S. Truman 1884-1972

God of battles, great god of war
whose naked sword now and forever
Implants justice in men, and nations:
May history’s occasion be many
To encompass the death of humans
In their thousands, death lingering and
Slow, or swift as the bloody meteor
That scorching the sky is seen no more
Or as a sudden puff of smoke that drifts
Across desert tracks when the wind lifts.

History, a cheap success story,
Impatient of groans that lack glory
Has no remembrance of the trampled slave
Though fired by thought, loving and brave,
But keeps a ready flattering smile
For his captors callous and doomful,
So my deed nourished the womb of fate
Washed of its birthstains men will rank great
And I neither feel nor sense evil
But die an old man, honoured by all.

Xmas, 1972
Irving Layton

PS A Happy New Year!


2Two lines have been crossed out at this point, and several words have been crossed out here and throughout the poem.

678.[ppc] December 29, 1972

Dear Desmond,

The North Vietnamese might’ve saved themselves much grief1 had they read my early letters to the editor2 with the attention they deserved. In them I said the USA wd never compromise on one thing—the independence and viability of S Vietnam. The bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong presently going on ought to convince them that Nixon is NOT a Harvard intellectual3 (for which the gods be highly praised) and that their dirty commie tricks may work on others, but not on him. What Nixon is reported to have said about Harry Truman can with equal justice be said about him: he’s a man of guts and vision.4 I take off my hat to him. Long may he flourish.

Irving

The defeat of the NV at Anhoi and Hani are turning-points in modern history.

1North Vietnam was subjected to the heaviest bombing of the Indochina War as American planes resumed massive strikes December 18th after the breakdown of peace negotiations in Paris. The Christmas bombing of 1972 (Operation Linebacker II) was directed primarily against Hanoi and Haiphong.


3Layton may be alluding to anti-war Harvard liberals such as Schlesinger and Sweezy, or he may be comparing Nixon favorably with John F. Kennedy, a Harvard graduate.

679. [ppc]

Funeraria 'Olèa'

In large black letters:
Servicia dia y noche.
Obviously this is not a dead business,
It is a thriving business.
Go in,
See for yourselves the white coffins
Lying in wait for the townspeople.

The tiniest caskets
Are the most numerous;
The women in these parts
Are always pregnant with them.

I revised the Truman poem. It’s a fine thing now. IPL

1Irving Layton, "Funeraria Olèa," The Pole-Vaulter 41.

680.

Dear Desmond,

When we returned from Zihuatanejo I found your letter, dated Dec 18th, waiting for me. You must have found some of my postcards strange, for they made no allusions to the sad news contained in your letter. But we left Toronto on the 16th, and, of course, left no forwarding address. Aviva and I are both very miserable at the way things have turned out for you. We both were sure that the Presidency was in the bag for you--after all, all the signs pointed to your getting it. I don’t need to enumerate them again--certainly not to you--and if there was any justice or even good sense in the world, I’d be saluting you as President Pacey, and Mary would be the First Lady of Fredericton. I know how you feel. I suppose it’s the being so close to the thing and having it snatched away at the last moment is what makes the experience so devastating. Well, it’s their loss more than yours, Desmond. If it was a right wing ‘coup’, then all that one can say is that they’ve exhibited their usual obtuseness. I don’t know anything about Anderson, but I do know you: it isn’t friendship alone that makes me say the university could not have found anyone more capable or loyal to serve it. It must have been very gratifying to have the faculty solidly behind you, and after all that ought to count more with you than what a bunch of lousy brewers and businessmen from the city of St. John think of you. The latter are toilet paper to wipe your ass with in a reflective moment. Anyhow, I can’t help thinking that I’d like to see you cut down on your administrative and teaching duties and devoting more time to your literary and creative work. I’d like to see another volume of short stories, and
another one of critical essays. You’ve done first-rate and memorable work in both. So I’m inclined to agree with you: in the short run, it may feel like a kick in the teeth; but it may turn out that those bastards, without meaning to, have done you a service. In my books, writing a good short story or a perceptive essay, or winning the affection and loyalty of one’s peers—and you’ve done all these, and much else besides—is a lot more important, and more revealing of the man, than administering a university. Just say to yourself that your family and friends love you no less without the Presidency just as they would have loved you not a jot more with it.

Aviva sends love and best wishes. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving


681. January 29, 1973
Dear Desmond,
I sent you poems, postcards and a letter, and am surprised and puzzled that I’ve not had a word from you. Nothing wrong, I hope. I mean, you haven’t blown your brains out because you’re not the prexy of UNB. Your friends love and admire you no less.

Yassu,
Irving


682. February 2, 1973
Dear Irving,
I am a bit puzzled by your note of Jan 29th complaining that you haven’t heard from me. I feel sure that I have written to you several times in the last few weeks.
If I haven’t, it may be because
(a) I expected to see you at Bishop’s in early January—they had told me that you would be there at their Festival of the Arts, & that was the chief reason I agreed to go.
(b) We have the same kind of budget problems as York (a projected deficit of $3m) & in order to avoid the hassle that developed at York & led to Slater’s collapse I have been holding meetings with all departments & faculties to agree on ways to save money.
Anyway, I do hope we shall meet next week in Calgary. I really should not take time to go that Conference, but having agreed to give a paper I shall go through with it unless some grave emergency arises. I’ll give you our news when I see you—there is nothing much to report anyway, as for the most part I have been struggling merely to keep the university ship afloat in the heaviest seas we have ever known! It meant a lot when the other night I addressed the whole faculty on the crisis & the need to cut budgets—and got cheered rather than booed! Love to Her Loveliness, Aviva!

As ever, Des


April 18, 1973

Dear Irving,

I’ve just returned from a month’s holiday in the UK to find the clippings you sent me on March 22 re your Devilshit poem etc. I’m glad you’re still stirring ’em up!

Mary & I had a great rest—we spent a few days in St Ives with Norman Levine, a few days in Wales with old friends,¹ a few days in Cambridge & a final week in London doing the theatres.

I’ve come back to find my desk piled high & so can’t write at length. When do you leave for Greece² or wherever? Mary & I plan to be in Toronto for the weekend of May 26 & should love to see you & Aviva if you’ll be there.

All the best,
Des Pacey

¹For Enoch (see 448.9) and his wife.

²Layton spent the summer months in Greece, principally on the island of Molibos, 1971-74.
Well, at the time we came up to Toronto we had left our house in a complete mess, having been forced to evacuate it for two weeks by the flood of the St John River. The water filled our basement completely & came right up to the first floor level. Before evacuating it we had to cart all our furniture etc up to the second floor--& even so we suffered about $6000 damage (for which we have now received $4000 compensation relief from the Govt). On our way up to Ontario, Mary & I stayed overnight in a motel in Syracuse, NY, & we were just nicely asleep when the bloody thing caught fire & burned to the ground--& we had to evacuate that in our pyjamas & stand around in the night air for some 3 hrs before being transferred to another motel.

Nothing else of a catastrophic nature has yet occurred, but it does seem that the Pacey star was not in the ascendant in 1973--& during our brief stay in Ontario we were constantly anxious to get back home to tackle the job of restoring our house to normalcy & so weren’t really in the mood for visiting. We had every intention of trying to see you, but we were staying with Mary’s aged father & various other members of the family descended on us & tied us down pretty constantly. We should have loved to see you.

I have completed the edition of the Grove letters & am hard at work on the Roberts letters. My Major Canadian Writers goes to press this week & my Selected Short Stories should be out next month.

Peter heard Aviva on the CBC this morning on "The Artist & Sexuality" & reports that she was by far the most articulate member of the panel & that he thought she had a lovely sexy voice! Like father, like son! How I would love to hear that sexy voice breathing sweet nothings into my aged but still lecherous ear!

I love you both tremendously & apologize for being such a rotten correspondent of late.

Mary & I leave for 4 weeks in England & Scotland on July 26. Try to drop us a line before that.

As ever,
Des Pacey

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1Triggered by an unusually high snowfall in the preceding winter, the Saint John river overflowed its banks in April of 1973, causing $11 million in damage in the province including over $5 million in the Fredericton area.

2See 585.5.

3The Collected Letters of Charles G.D. Roberts eds. Desmond Pacey and Laurel Boone (Fredericton: Goose Lane, 1989).


822

685.[ppc]  
Greece  
August 25, 1973

Dear Desmond,

I was gladdened by your letter which I found waiting for me when I arrived from Budapest. Now everything has been cleared up and I can understand your silence. So far it’s been a great summer of writing for me; I’ve another book of poems ready for M & S. I’m calling it The Pole-Vaulter.¹ I think it’s my best to date—so good that I’m tempted to make it my last one, for it sums up perfectly what I’ve been struggling to say in the others. We’ll see. I hope you’re having a wonderful summer also. My love to Mary.

Yassu,

Irving Layton

PS I’m island-hopping in the Dodecanese. From Patmos I’m going to Kos.²


²The Dodecanese is a group of Greek islands in the Southeast Aegean; Patmos and Kos are two of the fourteen main islands in the group.

686.[ppc]  
Hong Kong  
[October 31, 1973pm]

Bamboo Shoot¹
If I had women and wine
And all of China to roam
I’d find the ghost of Li Po
And match him poem for poem.

As you see, travel hasn’t moderated my conceit. Why should it? I’ve finished another book, The Pole-Vaulter, and my right hand seems to have lost none of its cunning. I’m off to Bangkok, afterwards to the braless breasts of the Balinese. Will write you a long letter as soon as we’re settled. We often think of you, and always with warmth and affection. Love to Mary.

Hugs,

Irving

¹Irving Layton, "Bamboo Shoot," published as the third section of "Asian Suite," The Pole-Vaulter 82-83.

687.[ppc]  
Georgetown, Malaysia  
December 2, 1973

Hi,

Saw your son’s poems in Manna.¹ Fine, very fine. If you or he isn’t careful, you might have a poet on your hands. I don’t envy you...In Bangkok I watched the thighs go by. Very lovely, they almost made me a convert to
Buddhism. Fancy me in an ashram? Did you receive my pc? Will write you a long letter once I’m settled. From here I’m off to Bali, and then it’s Sydney for rest and meditation. The mss for The Pole-Vaulter is at McStew and will be published next September. I hope to finish another book before then. All goes well. I hope you had a marvellous summer. You’ve been a great, good friend—a very patient one. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving


Indonesia
December 14, 1973

Dear Desmond,

Yesterday, I sent off a beautiful lyric, "Ch’an Artist,"1 to John Newlove for inclusion in The Pole-Vaulter. I must be driving him crazy because I’ve been doing that ever since I mailed him the mss for the book. I’ve written about ten poems since then, all of them inspired by the new sights, sounds and smells I’ve encountered in this part of the world. Never have I felt more alert and vigorous. However, should it sometimes occur to you to marvel at my continuing creativity—I’ll be 62 in a couple of months—you must consider that I possessed two enormous advantages: an impossible marriage and my Jewish origins. They have given me enough pain and insight derived therefrom to fuel my creativity for another thousand years—if my health holds out that long!

Hugs,
Irving

PS Love to Mary.

1Irving Layton, "Ch’an Artist," The Pole-Vaulter 86.

Bali, Indonesia
December 14, 1973

"Ch’an Artist"
Through the loving contemplation
of transiency and mutability
I received a foretaste of eternity
and saw with luminous certitude
that the wheel turned and did not turn.

Drawing a roseleaf for ten years
I flowed at last into the leaf;
I shuddered at the raindrop’s touch
till I became raindrop and splash;
now I draw the roseleaf perfectly.
Dear Desmond,

I hope you’ve received some of the postcards I’ve sent along the way. My last one had a poem on it, "Ch’an Artist", and I mailed it in Bali, a foul tourist trap if ever there was one, and a very unhealthy one at that. All three of us came down with one thing or another and Aviva had to be supported, so ill she was, to the airplane that was to take us away from that poisonous place. It’s taken me all of these past two weeks in Sydney to retrieve my former vigour though Aviva is still not in tiptop shape. However she is getting there. We’ve a comfortable house, fully furnished & equipped, in a thoroughly respectable part of Sydney where one never sees or hears one’s neighbours, only their numerous dogs. The city itself is lovely beyond expectation though it strikes me as consisting of a dozen suburbs looking for a centre to attach itself to. From almost anywhere in Sydney you can see the ocean or the inlets and bays it has sired...Since my arrival I’ve been steeping myself in what there is of Australian literature: poems, novels, biographies etc. The giant of course is Patrick White whose stature is at last beginning to get the recognition it deserves. Aviva is tickled pink that he got the Nobel Prize because it reassures her that she’s picked a winner. His getting it will also stimulate her to get to work sooner on the completion of her PhD thesis on him and afterwards working it into a book. I’ve read her MA thesis on him; it’s a superb job of interpretation and exposition. I very much doubt that there’s anyone anywhere who can come up with a better book on White than hers. She’s written to Viking Press offering it to them when she’s finished...Australia is Canada without the United States. Being here has made me even more disgusted with the hairless shits back home who couldn’t find a single good thing to say in favour of the USA. May all their back teeth rot! Let it never be forgotten that I was the only one who had the guts to stick his neck out when the anti-American hysteria was at its intensest. It’s right there in Purdy’s New Romans—my poem is the single unequivocal endorsement of American culture, though not without an awareness of its seamier aspects. I was ridiculed for it by the leftist louts and the gutless twerps who have steamrollered my gullible and not-so-bright compatriots into a foul anti-Americanism that smells to heaven. But you know my opinion from a way back of the moral & intellectual courage of our native cognoscenti so I shan’t paint the article any browner than it is...The United States was the only country (apart from tiny Holland) that didn’t knuckle under [to] Arab blackmail. The rest of Europe behaved just as I had predicted in poem after poem: "Sunbathers", "After Auschwitz", "Ruins", and many others. And wait until you see the ‘prophetic’ poems in The Pole-
Vaulter which I wrote after my visit to the Anne Frank house. But my good friend, what's the use? Poetry makes nothing happen. It can't change the minds of imbeciles, certainly not those of the leftist imbeciles in Canada who have swallowed the Russian-Arab propaganda line re Israel hook, line and sinker. Will it make, no will the Yom Kippur War and its aftermath make them remove their blowups of Ché Guevera from their bedrooms or keep the Milton Acorns, Purdys, Eli Mandels, Rosenblatts and Atwoods from writing the naive sociological claptrap they've regaled us with during the past five years or so? Hardly. Against stupidity even the gods fight in vain! And frankly, I don't know of any country that has more stupid people in it per square centimetre than Canada. Its intelligentsia is a disgrace, its lack of insight and intelligence being matched only by its cowardice. I shall never forget how A.J.M. Smith was able to cow all of Canada's leading writers into foregoing a report of their activities to the press. That lesson has never been lost on me.

Hugs,
Irving

PS My love to Mary. Best wishes for an exciting and happy 1974 to yourself, and to all who are dear to you. Aviva joins me in wishing you a great new year and sends her love.

1Australian novelist Patrick White (1912-1990) won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973.

2"In late February 1974, Irving and Aviva were invited to have dinner with Patrick White...to her dismay, White advised her not to continue her work on him, advice she took to heart when she returned to Toronto." Elspeth Cameron, Irving Layton 393.


5Sharp price increases were announced by most of the major oil-exporting countries (OPEC) in December 1973 following earlier increases announced in the previous two months; Layton is probably referring to Nixon's recent signing of a bill enabling construction of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline and the Netherlands' aggressive oil and gas exploration in the North Sea.


7Layton, "After Auschwitz," The Whole Bloody Bird 149.

8Layton, "Ruins," Periods of the Moon 77.


On October 6, 1973, war broke out when Egyptian and Syrian forces attacked Israeli positions along the Suez Canal and in the Golan Heights; the attack occurred on Yom Kippur, the most sacred Jewish holy day. Israel ultimately pushed back the Arab forces, recapturing the Golan Heights and some additional Syrian territory before a ceasefire was signed on October 24.

Layton refers to the policy of oil price increases and export reductions of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).


The writers Layton cites here are well-known for their left-wing, anti-American political position.

Schiller; see 366.6.

See 9.5.

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January 8, 1974

Dear Desmond,

Why am I shooting my mouth off and bombinating all over the place? Because I know that the Western democracies face in Communism an enemy a thousandfold more cunning and ruthless than Fascism. And from my nightmarish memories of the thirties I know how flabby and indecisive they can be just when action and moral resolution are needed. For me, recalling the moral and political vacuum I lived through then, it's all something of a 'déjà vu.' If you want my honest feelings I'll tell you I'm scared stiff. I don't think freedom matters all that much to the homunculi a capitalistic technology has created, to the rootless discontented massenmensch still gnawing on the worm-eaten husk of Christianity. Only the United States stands between them and their enslavement—or do you expect miracles of vigour and self-sacrifice from France, Gt Britain and Germany? Faugh, they would fall on their knees at the first Russian bombfall. But the United States is itself weakened by division and stupefied by an idealism whose ludicrous blindness was responsible for the Rooseveltian capitulations at Yalta. When one knows something about the nature of bolshevism, its utter amorality and disregard for principles and human life and thinks of it confronted by that same idealism, he wants to utter a warning shriek that would pierce everyone's eardrums. The so-called détente may collapse tomorrow and with it the peace Kissinger has been trying to stitch together in the Middle East; if it does collapse, 1974 and the next decade or two will turn out to be the most harrowing and the most dangerous years for free men everywhere. Will they rally in time, and will there be enough of them to withstand the pressure which the ideological thugs in the Kremlin will launch against them? Frankly, I'm pessimistic. Those thugs hold some exceptionally good cards, apart from the blindness and
stupidity of our poisoned intelligentsias, not to mention their self-seeking cowardice. Let me list them for you: the possibility of an attack by N Vietnam against the Thieu government. Even if Nixon decided he can’t do anything about it, can you imagine the anguish that would sweep across the country if such an event took place? And the deepening doubts and self-divisions, the growing paralysis of the will? OK. Now try this one on for size: at the behest of the Soviet Union, the Arab states tighten the oil squeeze leading almost certainly to the collapse of the economy in western Europe. The resulting mass unemployment would certainly lead to an attempt—probably a successful one—on the part of the communist parties in Italy and France to seize power. Germany would follow next. How do you like that scenario, my friend? Believe me, it could very likely happen; in fact I’ve the feeling that events are going to unfold just like that. And wait a moment, I haven’t yet pulled out the Russian’s trump card, namely, their leadership of the third world, of the backward nations in Africa, Asia and South America. If not their leadership in all instances, then certainly their excellent standing with them. And against all that and more, countries rotted and debilitated by bourgeois-Christianity, an ideology and outlook as effective against communism as a painted toy airplane against a sputnik. I could go on but I think I’ve compressed much of what I have to say in the two following poems.

Leviathan

Faith or ideals lacking
how will they resist
another tyrant or dictator?

Luckily
no one has the will or energy
to enslave them either:
they also are lacking

(However, the Russians do have the energy. In the 2nd verse I was thinking of national strongmen à la Mussolini & Hitler.)

Only boredom
will ever conquer them again,
the futility
they find each night in their own
mirrors

Out of their effluvium
and collective nothingness
is built
the final Leviathan
For the Fraulein from Hamburg

Poor mortal
you show a white-coated tongue
to the world

Bone-weary of the political leaflet
hash
and the occasional excitation
of your clitoris

Even the misery
of other despoiled humans
superfluous like yourself
no longer cheers
or relieves the ache
of your cureless insignificance

You hold up fists
to be manacled, fraulein,
and shrewder decadents than you
will again congeal your nullity
into the slavemaster’s whip.

Both poems were written this summer, and are in The Pole-Vaulter. If you think these are harsh judgements on Europe and Europeans, wait till you read "The Final Solution" and "The Shadow" also in PV.9

Yup, things are going to drop from the skies, and it isn’t going to be rain...When I’d read my poem "The End of the White Mouse",11 I’d tell my audience that I wasn’t talking about a white mouse at all, and that its being swallowed up by a viperous russelli12 wasn’t altogether a literary affectation...

PS I’ve been informed by the archangel Michael that each time he and the heavenly hosts think of the political innocency & naivete of the blissful "canuck shmucks" writing for our leading newspapers, magazines and journals, they make the heavens reverberate with their laughter. We think it’s thunder...

1German: mass man, collective man.

2On February 4-11, 1945, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin met at Yalta in the Crimea; when Conference protocols were finally published in 1946 it was charged that F.D.R. had been ill and hence incompetent in allowing the Soviet Union far too great a control in determining the future of Poland, Germany and China.

3A peace conference on the Middle East opened in Geneva on December 21, 1973; Henry Kissinger, US Secretary of State had travelled on mediatory missions to Egypt, Israel and Syria throughout December in an attempt to bring the three sides together.
In a strongly-worded speech on January 4, President Nguyen Van Thieu warned that the ceasefire in effect since 15 June 1973, would soon end: "as far as the armed forces are concerned the war has begun again" because "the Communists do not want to give up their ambition to attack and annex the South."

5See 694.9.

6See 136.5.

7Irving Layton, "Leviathan," The Pole-Vaulter 40.

8Layton, "For the Fraulein from Hamburg," The Pole-Vaulter 16-17.

9See 690.9.

10"We've been watching you over the garden wall for hours
The sky is darkening like a stain
Something is going to fall from the sky like rain
And it won't be flowers."

11See 613.1.

12Vipera russelli, (Russell's viper), a venomous snake found on the Indian peninsula and eastward to Java, Formosa and other smaller Pacific islands; Layton is playing on the similarity of russelli to Russian.

692. January 9, 1974
Dear Desmond,
I shan't apologize for yesterday's outburst, though I will withdraw my remark that the Canadians are the most stupid people in the world. I let my rage against their cognoscenti consume them too. That's unfair, and goes contrary to my perception that the average man or woman is a whole lot more sensible than the fartless intellectuals who purport to speak for them. I've been reading Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago, or rather the three installments that have appeared in the Sydney Herald. Their revelations of communist sadism, treachery and viciousness have sickened me as no other account of them has before. But what has added to my nausea and elicited yesterday's outburst was the awareness of how few have been the writers who've spoken out vigorously against the terror of Soviet despotism. Instead, their obsession has been entirely with the evilness and 'decadence' of the United States. I called attention to that evilness as far back as 1963 in my "preface" to Balls For A One-Armed Juggler and later, in 1968, in my "preface" to The Shattered Plinths. I can't recall a single Canadian reviewer alluding to my observations or making any sort of comment on them. As if a bullet had dropped into a barrel of oil! Compare that with the hullabaloos and huzzas that greeted every anti-American diatribe, every stupid or scurrilous insult that was thrown at the United States and
all its doings. America, you remember, was fascist, imperialist, militaristic, decadent, evil and everything else that sick wordmongers were able to dredge up from their neuroses. It was worth as much as your life—and I'm speaking from personal experience—to say a word in defense of the United States when the Barry Lords and Barry Callaghans, flanked by the Atwoods, Purdys and Fulfords were frothing at the mouth about the desperate sins of the USA. I'll grant you, the intellectuals in other countries were not much better. There were no Orwells among them, that's for sure, to point out that the same poison was circulating in their bloodstream now as was responsible for the leftist buboes appearing on their psyches during the thirties and forties. I steeped myself in Orwell this summer. Migod how he towers above the infected Stalinoidal shits that surrounded him everywhere. Well, unfortunately we have no one to replace him because he was an extraordinary combination of courage, integrity and insight. Most intellectuals are gutless and most intellectuals haven't a pennyworth of intuition. They make up the run-of-the-mill journalists, editors, broadcasters, etc—forever doomed to limp after the important event when it happens, or worse malediction yet, to be totally unaware of it. That's why the world will always need its poets, its Solzhenitsyns and Daniels, its Mandelshtams and Brodskis, the last three by an 'odd' coincidence all Jews. Here's a paragraph from my "foreword" to The Pole-Vaulter: "Both National Socialism and Russian National Communism have aimed to degrade human beings to the condition of cringing slaves and robots. As the arrogant Nazis learned, just so the present masters of the Soviet Union are learning: the Jew with his tenacious faith in the creative principle and in human dignity is their unyielding antagonist. Surely it is no accident that the most prominent and most spirited dissenters in that accursed land have been Jews: Pasternak, Daniel, Litvinov, Mandelshtam, Brodski, Ginzburg and the eminent physicist Sakharov to select names at random. On the contrary, the fact of their dissent and fierce opposition lies embedded in the logic of Jewish history itself..." (I wrote this months ago.)

Is it an accident that Israel and the United States should be linked in a common fight against Soviet despotism and its miserable catspaws in the Middle East and that a German Jew should be the architect of the peace that I foresee coming to that troubled region? I see in all this, not chance or mere accident, but historical necessity working itself out in a profound symbolism that is, I fear, beyond the competency of any living writer to grasp or convey. Were I younger I'd make the attempt but humility forces me to doubt whether I'd succeed. But at least I know where the important subject of our time lies which is more than can be said of our mother-fucking intellectuals and journalists. God, how I despise them! Don't tell me I am being unfair to them by putting them all under the same
blood-soaked blanket. I know that as well as you do. But all art is exaggeration—an exaggeration of a truth, however. The painful irrefutable truth is that by and large intellectuals bear a grisly responsibility for the communist victories, beginning with the Russian revolution and their obscene ass-licking of Lenin. If you’ve read S’s Gulag Archipelago you’ll have seen that he traces Soviet tyranny right back to that bald-headed five-foot-nothing runt. My, how that’s going to make some of our poisoned rats squeal with pain! LENIN! No, not him, not that god! Again, my dear friend, I said as much years & years ago. But did I have any listeners? And I said it as recently as Lovers And Lesser Men in which you will find an irreverent poem called "A Political Dream"13 where I have that cruel mongoloid turning his corpseless head to see how a clinker from my ass is falling on Stalin’s moustache. Did any reviewer of the book ever refer to this poem and its possible implications. Are you kidding? Have you read any of the reviews of Lovers And Lesser Men? Incredible...incredible that is to anyone who hasn’t lived in Canada for as long as I have and experienced at first hand the dullness, insipidity, sheer brainlessness and of course the incurable mediocrity and third-ratedness of our so-called poultry-lovers and critics. Agh! Or is it that their shrivelled puritanical souls, corroded by the rust of Christianity, can not endure the sight of a man who has enjoyed his life and doesn’t plop down on his knees, come what may, in terror or gratitude? May their faces be covered with haemmorhoids!

Hugs,
Irving

PS Did you read what Solzhenitsyn thinks of the "statesmanship" of Roosevelt and Churchill in surrendering Eastern Europe into Stalin’s maw?14 Precisely my own sentiments.

1Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Gulag Archipelago Sydney Herald 6-8 January 1974.

2Layton refers to a passage from his foreword to Balls for a One-Armed Juggler:
Beside the mass slaughters, crimes, cynical treacheries, perversions and unheard-of cruelties of the Nazis and Bolsheviks...It was left for this century to produce two monsters without their peer in the history of mankind: Hitler and Stalin...There is a frightful stink in the soul of all men and women living today. Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Vorkuta, the Soviet frame-up trials of the ‘thirties: with these man touched the infiniteness of evil—and survived! (xix)

3Layton’s foreword to The Shattered Plinths notes:
The monstrous acts of National Socialism and National Bolshevism in the very heart of Europe are now to be apprehended not as causes of our moral degeneration but as symptoms—what they signal is the complete collapse of the traditional christian and humanistic values which hitherto Western man had pretended to allow himself to be governed by...The Russian communists have many crimes to answer for; this latest crime, however, has got them an execration equalled only by that which their infamous pact with Hitler’s Germany in 1939 called forth. (13-14)

4Barry Lord (b 1939) poet, art historian and critic, teaches communications at Conestoga College in Kitchener, author of *Subject/Object: Poems* (1967) and *The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art* (1974).

5George Orwell* (Eric Arthur Blair; 1903—1950), English novelist and critic who became his country's most prominent political writer in the 1930's and 1940's; a militant socialist and fervent anti-communist, Orwell doggedly attacked political orthodoxy of the left and the right, leading V.S. Pritchett to eulogize him as the "conscience of his generation."

6Yuri Daniel (b. 1925), Soviet writer and translator, arrested in 1965; sentenced to five years' imprisonment in February 1966.

7Joseph Brodsky (b. 1940) Russian-born poet, awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1987; charged with "social parasitism" by Soviet authorities in 1964, he was sentenced to five years of hard labour and exiled to the United States in 1972.

8Irving Layton, "Foreword," *The Pole-Vaulter* 9-11. (Layton quotes the third paragraph.)

9Pavel Litvinov (b. 1940), physics instructor sentenced in 1968 to five years' internal exile for demonstrating against the invasion of Czechoslovakia; emigrated in 1973.

10Alexander Ginzburg (b. 1936), founder of the Soviet literary magazine *Syntax* (for which he was expelled from university in 1960); tried and convicted of "anti-Soviet agitation" in 1978, he was sentenced to eight years in the labour camps.

11Andrei Sakharov (1921-89), Soviet nuclear physicist, an outspoken advocate of human rights, civil liberties and reform in the Soviet Union; he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1975.

12Henry Kissinger; see 691.3.


693. [ts] [January 10, 1974pm]

"For Nadezhda Mandelshtam*"

Nadezhda, my grey-haired love, my darling
I write you from the cold whiteness of Toronto
Hoping my affection for you thaws the ice and snow
Between us, melts the barbed wire around your heart.

Though gallant lady, you’re so much like my mother.
She too would have spat at the Kremlin’s mountaineer,
At the contemptible pigmies and half-men who let him
Play tunes on their skulls with his grubby fingers.

I’ve friends with soft hearts and softer heads
Who grieve when fire rains down on evil men
And perhaps you also see the bulging eyes of the dead
And feel the stink and silence that surrounds them

As they move into history. Perhaps like them
You also march in groups, sign petitions, disapprove
Of America’s might, saying what message has poetry
For this sad demented world except love.

Perhaps. But not I, my grey-haired darling.
When freedom flings his fiery horseshoes they explode,
Sending scorching nails with a loud noise
At the heads, eyes and groins of my enemies.

In a hard school it was drilled into me
To tumble vermin into a hot cauldron death;
In the dungheap of contemporary history
The Stalins hatch everywhere. The poet must break

Their backs with a hammer’s blow.
One does not fool around with broad-chested Ossetes;
One does not wait to see their cockroach whiskers grow.
Were Osip with me he’d have my sad ache and agree.

Irving Layton
Toronto, Ont
October 1973

Dear Desmond,

I wrote this poem last year after I’d finished reading her book Hope Against Hope. I sent it around to several mags, but no one would publish it. The other day I mailed it off to The Can [Forum] poetry editor, Tom Marshall. Did I tell you I’ve dedicated The Pole-Vaulter to Nadezhda Mandelshtam and Heda Kovely? The latter is a Czech jewess who managed to survive the stink and infamy of first, National Socialism, and afterwards communism. I’d like to get hold of the sequel to Hope Against Hope which I understand has just been published but Sydney bookwise is still living in the Stone Age. Its title will I think offend you, the perennial optimist (Judith Wright’s criticism reminds me somewhat of yours: she gives bad marks to anyone who expresses the slightest nihilistic whimper). It’s called Without Hope. Of course it may also be only a play on her name: Nadezhda is Russian for hope. So the title can translate itself into—this stinking system in the Soviet Union can’t include me. Rather subtle, eh?...By the way I just read in the morning papers that Gt Britain (home of the brave and land of the free) is concluding a series of deals with the Arab states, trading goods and arms for oil. It’s a cop-out from the concerted action Nixon has been trying to arrange between the oil-thirsty nations to meet the Arab blackmail and to which the British themselves recently paid lip service. Their perfidy will lead to
another blow-up with the Americans but at this point I don’t think they know what they’re doing.

Hugs,
Irving

1Irving Layton, "For Nadezhda Mandelshtam," The Pole-Vaulter 36.

2Town in the Soviet Union, birthplace of Joseph Stalin.


694. January 10, 1974
Dear Desmond,

In some strange and mysterious way the fate of the free world, of civilization itself, is linked to that of the Jews. Europe’s and America’s refusal or inability to see that in the 30’s brought the agony of the Second World War on them. With a cowardice and a callousness that is as well-documented as it is unforgettable, millions of Jews were consigned to the German death camps where they were exterminated like noxious insects. The reason I’ve unleashed an epistolary blitz against you is that I’ve a feeling the so-called "civilized" world may be planning something similar, the extermination of the 2½ million Jews in Israel, this time the Russian bolshevik thugs pulling the levers of destruction instead of the German Nazis.

Well, I’m not over-optimistic about human intelligence or goodness, so when I see the growing isolation of Israel and the knowing looks that Jews everywhere are being given because the thermostats have to be lowered or the family must forego its Sunday drive,¹ my instincts tell me once again it’s not roses that are going to fall from the sky.² If I have a faith in anything it is in the regularity with which human blindness, human stupidity and human viciousness can manifest themselves. Case in point: The Russians pull the levers starting wars in Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East; they crush the rebellions against communist tyranny in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. --During all that time, it’s the Americans, we are told day in and day out by the shmucks, that need watching for their imperialism, militarism, etc...But let me whisper something in your ear: this time Jews are not going to let themselves be slaughtered without leaving the world terribly scarred by their final rite of passage. Did you ever hear of Armageddon?

Irving
The Arab-Israeli War of 6—24 October 1973, and US support for Israel led to restrictive action being taken by Arab countries (the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries: OAPEC) in respect to oil supplies to the developed countries, to the partial nationalization by Iraq of the Basrah Petroleum Company, and to greatly-increased prices for crude oil and rationing by developed countries.

See 691.10.

Are you still there, Desmond? Am I coming across to you? Do you still hear me? Or are you also looking thoughtfully at your thermostat these days and muttering curses under your breath? Maybe you lowered it again just an instant ago and are even now asking yourself what’s got into your amiable friend, why he keeps bombarding you with poems and intemperate letters. I can understand your bewilderment, believe me I even share your dismay. Bear with me a little while longer. You see, I awoke from a dream and fell into a nightmare. I once upon a time believed that a dialogue— even after Auschwitz and Belsen, even after the world’s complicity in its horrors—between Jews and non-Jews was possible, perhaps even a reconciliation. I now know with absolute certainty it’s the Jews’ mysterious fate to be eternally in conflict with the world, to be at war with its daily assumptions and practices—to be forever an outcast and exile. Perhaps never more so than now when he appears to have put down roots somewhere on this earth and achieved statehood. The Yom Kippur war and its aftermath still spreading like a huge stain—not of oil but of blood—has convinced me of this, firmly and irrevocably. You will look in vain for any reference to the "preface" I wrote for Balls For A One-Armed Juggler and The Shattered Plinths where I addressed myself to the sadistic hoodlumism loosed by naziism and bolshevism and indicated its extension into the terrorism which has become the unstated ideology of our time. They were written before the hijackings began, the assassinations and kidnappings of highly-placed individuals in politics and industry by guerrillas fighting for one cause or another.¹ They were (and are) significant essays, into which I put a great deal of feeling and thought. How were they greeted? By silence. The silence which comes out of the yawning pit of Canadian culture-philistinism. Do you wonder why I continue to have such an unquenchable contempt for it? Why I wrote a poem "The Final Solution", which I’m sending you, where I equate the fate of the Jew with that of poetry itself. For the occidental world anyway, the world nursed on Judaism and its heresy, christianity. Not a single reference, not one. That’s what I call canucky shmuckism. Invisible, even when you knock it on the head with a book like Engagements... Two quotations and I release you from my obsessions: "We must live so we can tell what man is capable of doing to man. Perhaps this is God’s
will."—Jew in Treblinka.  
"Lo, it is a people that dwells above/ And shall not be numbered among the nations" Numbers 23:9. Desmond, are you still there? Are you listening? Am I coming through? 

Hugs,  
Irving

PS My warmest love to Mary.  
PPS[Aviva’s hand] A voice from the antipodeal silence--  
Desmond, are you there? Are you listening? I love you.  
Aviva.

1 The incidence of terrorist activities began to increase dramatically in 1969 and the early seventies; Layton is perhaps thinking of such recent events as the hijacking of a Pan American jet in Rome and the murder of thirty-three passengers by members of the Arab National Youth Organization for the Liberation of Palestine on December 17, and the assassination of Spanish Premier Luis Carrero Blanco in Madrid by Basque Terrorists on December 20.

2 See 690.9.

696.[ts]  

"For Anne Frank"1  
[January 13, 1974]

Clear-eyed sensitive Jewish girl  
gay
with love of life the world  
the strong-thighed and arrogant  
ever have wanted reasons to seek an end to us  

Dear intrepid heart  
dear chatterbox  
you have given them  
one more reason  
--you and Jesus

11

Now many will live by your name

Because you are only a child  
without medals and crucifixes,  
a promise of goodness and talent  
broken in half by the world’s brutal hand

A tender lyric an equivocal destiny  
forbade to grow into fertile splendour  
and the anguish of unfulfillment  
in the inconsolable tears of each of us

Anne, the abandoned of God  
who yet sought and found Him  
hiding behind your great error:
who cloaked Him with your faith and love

A legend on your smiling lips
you move gently into the future
that greets you with the light
from your own sombre eyes and laughter.

For Andrei Amalrik

Who speaks up for you, Andrei Amalrik?
Worse yet, today for whom do you speak?
Forsaken and more alone than any heretic
Who whitened into ash—where are your guns? Your bombs?
Brave soul, you have none. You have none.

Into the gas ovens with you like a helpless Jew
Into the slave camps or Kolymna mines
You have a mind; it is your ruin
Imagination and spirit; they are your undoing
Integrity. Luckless man, in these times? You are doomed.

Your ears were not fashioned for loudspeakers
Your eyes for the blueprints of beehive utopias
Your published wit as packing for Lenin’s ravings
The experts east and west want to squeeze oil
From your pores to keep their factory cylinders purring.

Your martyrdom means nothing to the young
With close-cropped slogans between their ears
And their terrible blank faces. Nothing. In East Berlin
To the red refuse swept up from every land
A thing to sneer at and entomb in Siberian silence.

You are a bitter portent for mankind, Andrei
As ominous as the death of Anne Frank
Swiftly the sun sinks and shadows mount the hill
Who besides yourself cares about freedom?
Only the wolves you see from your barred windows.

Dear Desmond:

I wrote this poem last July or August. It will of course be in the Pole-Vaulter. I wonder what canucky shmuckism will make of it. No I don’t—I know! As much as it made of the searing ‘political’ poems in the Shattered Plinths. Agh...

Irving

1Irving Layton, "For Anne Frank," The Pole-Vaulter 14.

2Layton, "For Andrei Amalrik," The Pole-Vaulter 38.
"The Final Solution"

It’s all been cleared away, not a trace:
laughter keeps the ghosts in the cold ovens
and who can hear the whimpering of small children
or of beaten men and women, the hovering echoes,
when the nickelodeons play all day the latest Berliner
love ballads, not too loudly, just right?
Taste the blood in the perfect Rhenish wine
or smell the odour of fear when such lovely
well-scented frauleins are fiddling with the knobs
and smiling at the open-faced soldier in the corner?

History was having one of its fits—so what?
What does one do with a mad dog? One shoots it
finally and returns armless and bemedalled
to wife and children or goes to a Chaplin film
where in the accommodating dark the girlfriend
unzips your fly to warm her hands on your scrotum.
Heroes and villains, goodies and baddies, what
will you have to drink with your goulash? In art museums
together they’re shown the mad beast wagging its tail
at a double-hooked nose that dissolves into ash.

And appraised by gentlemen with clean fingernails
who admire a well-executed composition or pointed to
in hushes tones so that nothing of the novel frisson
be lost. Europe blew out its brains
for that frisson: gone forever are the poets and actors
the audacious comics that made Vienna and Warsaw
hold their sides with laughter. Gone, gone forever.
They will never return, these wild extravagant souls:
mediocrity stopped up their witty mouths,
envy salted the ground with their own sweet blood.

Sealed up their light in the lightless halls of death.
Alas, the world cannot endure too much poetry:
a single cracked syllable—with a cognac—suffices.
I have seen the children of reingemacht Europe, their
queer incurious dead eyes and handsome blank faces,
leather straps and long matted hair their sole madness.
They have no need of wit or extravagance, they have
their knapsacks, their colorful all-purpose knapsacks.
The nickelodeon grinds on like fate, six fatties play cards:
the day is too ordinary for ghosts or griefs.

Vienna, July 1973
Irving Layton

Dear Desmond,

Without doubt my recent letters must have struck you as
a farrago of racial and personal vanities, perhaps even as
puerile ravings in bad taste. That is the risk one takes
when writing or speaking without prudence or self-restraint. There is always the likelihood that one will not be understood. Yet all I wished to say to you can be condensed in Kafka’s anguished cry which I came across just a few days ago: "Strike at the Jew kill Man". I believe that once again we are entering a dangerous phase in history when all daggers are being sharpened and pointed at the breast of the Jew. If all Jews seem somewhat paranoid to you, please remember who made them so. We have all been suckled on the poisons of Auschwitz and Belsen, we can still smell the gases emanating from them. Since this god-intoxicated people were robbed of their faith in that very God which was their masterpiece how can anyone expect them to have faith in mere men? For myself as you know I have little: I am always astonished when a human being displays kindness or decency. But then I have had my psyche badly scarred—I taught in 1946 at the Jewish Library the survivors of Europe’s (note I say Europe’s, not Hitler’s) death camps. My contempt and hatred for Europe is something that I shall take into the grave with me. And my contempt and distrust of European culture, perhaps of any and all culture...

I see the future of human decency and freedom held in the unsteady hand of the United States. If that falters we are doomed. Gt Britain and France are a pair of whores, rotted with moral syphilis. Their days of pride and dignity are numbered. Still, the unslayable optimist in me says that things will turn out well in the end, though the feeling poet with his antennae reaching up into the troubled atmosphere remains unconvinced. Too many maimed and resentful people abroad, too many who are frustrated, repressed and filled with hatred, too many who would welcome another Armageddon and who would dance with a wild fury on the flaming roofs and in the streets and avenues swastika’d by gutters of blood. They are like the crowds who shout to the would-be suicide standing on the ledge of the window to jump and are furious with the policemen who dissuade her from doing so. Such brutalized hate-filled crowds are to be found in all the capitals and leading cities of the world, and the would-be suicide is mankind itself...Are you listening? Are you still there...

Hugs,
Irving

1See 690.9.

2German: purified; made clean and empty.


4Layton began teaching English to immigrants and courses in English literature in the "People’s University" at the Jewish People’s Library, beginning in 1933.
Let us revile the USA
and the fascist decadence splashing
across the border on our clean copybooks
not the USSR and its comfy
asylums for dissidents
its genrous bear-hug of Czechoslovakia
and Arab oil wells
And let us execrate
with one penetrating voice Trudeau
not ever the brave assassins
of Laporte
but note in poem and polemic
their contribution to justice
and ultimate reason
And let us continue
to keep all mention of the Holocaust
from our prose and poetry: the figures
on the annual production of pigs
in this country are more relevant
in every way
than its ashen grey meanings
Brethren, if we do
who will ever question
our lifelong devotion
to the purest shmuckerie? Irving Layton
Sydney, NSW
January 14, 1974

Desmond,
If in Canada I had to whip myself into a dervish frenzy, how much more so in bland, tanned Australia? Here, as once upon a time in Canada the poet has to stimulate himself by the most violent means. He must provide his own fuel in order to get his rocket off the ground. That's not to contradict or gainsay or even to modify the things I've been saying in my letters. The poem on the other side is proof of that. But the poem, unlike the angry letters, disciplines the emotions, makes them coherent by uniting them with a perception. The rocket metaphor comes back to mind. The letters I mailed you can be considered the props and sidings that fall away as soon as the rocket has been launched. They have served a purpose but have little or no value in themselves. I shall probably go on and write
several more poems because I haven't yet exhausted the reservoir of feeling I've accumulated over the past week thinking of the Yom Kippur war and the jockeying of European nations to see which one can display more meanness and perfidy. Have you read George Steiner's *Language and Silence*? There are some powerful essays in it. In one of them I came across the following: "The Jews are a people whom totalitarian barbarism must choose for its hatred." I dedicated *The Pole-Vaulter* to N. Mandelshtam and Heda Kovaly BEFORE I read it.

Hugs,
Irving


2 See 697.3.


Dear Irving,

Now that you have a settled address I can acknowledge the various postcards you have so kindly sent me, and the sudden avalanche of four single-spaced letters that have descended from the skies of Sydney!

I'm not going to be silly enough to engage you in political debate—you are a very political animal & I am not—but I will bring you up to date on my personal news. Incidentally, I shall be in Toronto for meetings early in February, & I greatly regret that you & Aviva will not be there to meet me—I should love to have a good long talk with you both.

Generally, 1973 was a much better year for me than was 1972. The new president & I get along remarkably well in view of the peculiar circumstances which brought us together. Mary & I had a very good trip to England, Wales & Scotland in July & August. I have been asked if I would stand for various other presidencies, including that of York (which I refused). I did, however, agree to have my name considered by Brock, & Mary & I were there for several days early in December. The result was that I was begged to accept their presidency, but ultimately turned it down just before Christmas. Now I am being asked whether I would be willing to succeed Tuzo Wilson as Principal of Erindale—and I haven't yet quite decided what to say. On the whole, I think it is very unlikely that I shall leave behind UNB, our house & garden, & our family & friends at this stage of my life, but it has done my morale good to be asked, after the humiliation of being beaten out for this presidency by one vote.

Things have been going well on the scholarly front too. My edition of Grove's letters was sent out to expert appraisers by the U of T Press in the summer, & they all
described it as a "landmark of Canadian scholarship"—so U of T Press has accepted the book & it is now in press. My anthology Major Canadian Writers came out just before Christmas, but my own book of short stories has not yet appeared though it was promised for the Fall. I have been making good progress on my two new projects—editions of C.G.D. Roberts’ letters & of his Complete Poems.2

The various members of the family have also been getting along well. Mary is to have two one-man exhibitions of her paintings in the near future, one in Saint John & one in Fredericton. My eldest son Philip is establishing himself firmly in the Chemistry Dept at Dalhousie, & has quite a long list of scientific papers to his credit. Mary Ann is enjoying her lecturing at Lennoxville, & Tish at St Thomas. Peter is a great success as an English teacher at Fredericton High School, & is also starring in both rugby & hockey. Margaret is doing her MLS at Western this year3 & wants to be a school librarian. Michael is in 3rd year at UNB & is still writing reams of poetry—he takes it very seriously indeed & has all sorts of notebooks in which he writes down observations, images, metrical patterns etc etc. Penny, 18 & the youngest, is in 1st year Arts & passed all her exams at Xmas—but only did really well in Philosophy & English. I don’t quite know what she will develop into, but she is very beautiful & very bright.

Well, this is a very egotistical letter, but I felt I should try to bring you up to date. I hope Aviva is enjoying herself & that you won’t give yourself apoplexy by all your political explosions! Why do you take the bloody world so seriously? If it wants to go to hell, why not let it? Sub specie aeternitatis4—what does it all amount to? What do any of us amount to? We have a little stretch of time, we can interact with other persons, we can grow a little ourselves—and then oblivion for us all & eventually for everything. So why rant & rave? Why not try to be kind, courteous, witty in our relations with others, to be as humane as possible ourselves? Well—

Love,
Des

1See 219.1
2Roberts’ Letters; see 684.3
3Margaret Pacey graduated with a Master of Library Science from Western University in 1974.
4See 313.8.
Dear Desmond,

Nice to have a friend to remind me of the eternal verities like death and kindness and death that swallows it up and courtesy and death that waits to swallow it up and humanity to others and death that waits to swallow it up and...But you’re right, my friend, you’re right. No wonder the prophets were stoned and reviled--it served them right for taking the world seriously and lacking a sense of humour. And today, certainly, the problems confronting mankind are too complex for the simple-minded solutions put forward by people with a "saviour complex". Also we know too much about inner conflicts and tensions not to question the motives of our would-be salvationists. And yet there’s Solzhenitsyn, a lonely heroic soul defying one of the most powerful empires the world has ever known--and it looks on helplessly while with each word he digs its grave deeper and deeper. What a grand, inspiring spectacle. I’m immensely happy that I’m alive to witness it...

However, honesty forces me to confess that it wasn’t only my fear that Israel was going to be sold down the Mediterranean that sparked off the intemperate letters of which you were the unfortunate recipient. That was the chief reason, yes, but on top of that it’s been one damned infuriating thing after another since we arrived in Sydney nearly a month ago. The house my mother-in-law secured for us is an absolute bummer--small, unaccommodating kitchen, dull rooms, tawdry furniture. She got it for us because it’s a ‘nice address’. At night, the house is damp and silent as a tomb, and the neighbourhood in which it’s situated is a dark cemetery in which the appearance of a ghost would be welcomed as some evidence of life and animation. Aviva has gone into an acute state of depression, and each morning I wake up to her moans, sighs, and tears, her eyes bleary with sleeplessness. Although I’ve signed the lease, I’ve got about a dozen agents scouring the city for us for another house. I know it will cost me a treasure to change accommodation, but if I don’t Aviva is going to spend the next six months in the looney-bin, with myself in the adjoining room.

Then some cuntless bitch in the Canada Council wrote me saying that my second installment was going to be quartered since I hadn’t sent in my statement of expenses for something that is called "program cost allowance". I wrote back and said I didn’t know what she was talking about. What program? I have no other except to write poems. I did send a full statement of my travel and subsistence expenses, and showed that I had spent more than $2000 over what had been allowed me on the first installment. Even that didn’t shake the redoubtable Linda Vallières. So I wrote her finally that had I known this was going to happen I’d have told her to stuff the grant up her royal asshole...In the meantime, however, I’ve been given a little over $1000 to live on for the next 3 mos, instead of the expected $4,500.
I also fired off a long letter to Naim Kattan\(^1\) that will certainly win no prizes for courtesy, kindness or humanity, though it might for the occasional mordancy of its wit. The bureaucratic jerks—what do they think I am, a mendicant?

Okay, this by way of explanation. I greatly appreciate your letter. You’re a wise and good man, and I consider myself undeservedly lucky to have you as a friend.

Love,
Irving

PS Will write another letter tomorrow. I’m delighted with your resumé of 1973. May 1974 be equally good to you. Love to Mary.

\(^1\)Naim Kattan (b. 1928), official in charge of the literary section of the Canada Council (1967-), member of the editorial board of *Les Lettres Nouvelles*, novelist (*La fiancée promise* 1983) and short story writer (*La Reprise* 1985).


Dear Desmond,

I didn’t leave any space in my last letter to tell you how much pleasure your good news about yourself has given me. Wow! That must have balmed your ego to have two universities want you for their Head. And why shouldn’t they? You’ve got all the qualifications, starting with experience and running all the way up the alphabet to zest, touching base at Intelligence, Loyalty, Tact—but I don’t want to turn your head with deserved compliments. How you have ever been able to combine administrative ability with scholarship, creativity, raising a family you can be proud of and writing literary criticism that more and more people are being influenced by evokes my envy and admiration. No bullshit, Desmond, it’s a magnificent feat of integration. The rabbis contended that earthly happiness was the direct result of righteousness and they defined happiness as long life, good health, wealth and a contented family life. You have all of these and much more. I don’t suppose you have an enemy in the world, but many who like myself admire you and cherish your friendship. Damnit, you almost turn a man to religion!

Your sons don’t seem to have given you much anxiety—or am I mistaken? Not even Michael the poet. But the other day I received a letter from Max telling me he wasn’t going to do graduate work because he wants to devote all his time to writing. He’s been the outstanding student in philosophy at McGill and all his mentors were predicting a brilliant career for him, he was getting straight A’s in all his subjects. Wynne Francis who had him for a student in one of her English courses figuratively licked her fingers with him each time I saw her in Montreal. I haven’t the slightest doubt he’d make a magnificent lecturer either in philosophy or in Englit. I guess his new resolve has something to do with his studying Kant this year. He’s enough to turn anyone away from the pursuit of philosophy—that parson!
But I guess it’s also that Max isn’t really cut out for the academic life. He says he wants to work in the bush for a year, save up a couple of thousands, and then go off to Greece to work on another book of poems. He’s already got one under his belt which he says he’s sending off to McGraw-Ryerson. I’ve seen many of the poems: they show, as they say, promise. Certainly they’re a whole lot better than what his father was writing at the same age. But in this business it’s not expertise that matters, it’s whether he has any demons gnawing at him, conflicts in the prosaic jargon of psychoanalysis. I once said to him: "Max, you’ve got all of my virtues and none of my vices." Alas, my poems have sprung from my vices, my unresolved tensions. Had I been a more virtuous man I should never have written a line of poetry. Poetry has been the tribute vice has paid to virtue, though my case—-I don’t really believe it--may be exceptional. To use psychoanalytical jargon again, I don’t think it’s possible for a well-integrated personality to write poetry—one writes it because that’s where one achieves it, AND ONLY THERE. In the poem, not in the personality. A truly great poet is so full of contradictions that he can hardly function as a social being and only manages to do so because it enables him to achieve a temporary integration by discharging the excess energies before they turn into black, self-destructive poisons. Now my son is one of the best-integrated individuals I’ve ever known, he’s truly the better half of me. If he has any demons nibbling at his entrails, he’s managed to keep it a secret from me. Still, there’s the encouraging empirical fact that he has written poems as well as several superb and very moving songs. I take that as evidence that there is unease and self-dissatisfaction. Good. Also he’s already had a broken marriage, so that’s encouraging. I’ve written somewhere that it takes three marriages to produce a seasoned poet. Unhappily, he’s been getting on very well with the girl he’s presently living with and she adores him. They’ve been together for several years and their union appears to be disgustingly stable. I can’t foresee any poetry coming out of that. However, the gods have been known to provide misfortunes to those whom they love and wish to turn into poets. Ultimately his fate is in their hands.

Well, it’s all about to start. Angus & Robertson have taken several hundred copies of my books and are planning a huge publicity campaign to mesh with the readings I shall be giving all over the country. I spoke to the Can High Commissioner today and he’s mapped out an interesting itinerary that will take me to every part of Australia. I shall be giving a reading at the Adelaide Festival and taking part in panel discussions with John Updike et al. The ABC phoned yesterday and wanted to know whether I’d appear on radio and TV. A rep is coming up [to] the house to look me over next Wednesday. I’ve met several interesting people, of both sexes. No poets or novelists,
so far. But I will, no fear, and that very soon. Some friend of Aviva's whose husband is a millionaire several times over is throwing a huge party in my honour next Saturday night at which the Sidneyian illuminati are supposed to materialize...I was going to type out another poem for you called "Bodhidharma". He's the chappie who brought Zen Buddhism to China. Have you ever seen a picture of him? I've sometimes thought I was a reincarnation of him. It's a good poem, I think, and I hope to get it into the Pole-Vaulter that is if John Newlove isn't too fed up with my pesterings...Again, many thanks for your wise letter.

Love,
Irving

1 Max Layton has not published a book of poems.

2 Layton was in Australia January-March 1974; he gave readings in Perth and Sydney.

3 The Australian Broadcasting Corporation.


February 12, 1974
Dear Irving (& Aviva),
Thank you for your letters of January 24 and 25.
I had suspected that something more than the sad state of the world and the problems of Israel lay behind the anger & frustration so evident in your recent rash of letters. I am in fact relieved to know that the "something" was nothing worse than the factors you mention--an unsatisfactory house in Sydney, bureaucratic bungling in the Canada Council. A casual reference in one of your earlier letters to "an impossible marriage"1 had led me to fear that you & Aviva were having trouble--and that really would upset me. What you say about your Sydney house reminds me of the house we had in Cambridge in 1962-3, with our 4 daughters forced to sleep in one small room, no central heating, and a living room into which the 8 of us could just fit haunch to haunch! It was terrible at the time, but now we look back on it as a great adventure--& it brought the family together marvellously!
Sorry to hear of Max's continued indecisiveness. He'll settle down one of these days & make you very proud of him. After all, he does have talent & brains & an attractive personality, so he's bound to make his mark in the long run.
On the whole our "children" are these days a source of comfort rather than worry to us. Philip & his wife have become the acknowledged leaders in Halifax in the movement to stop the tearing down of historic buildings to erect profitable high-rise buildings--& they've won several significant victories. Mary Ann is doing very well as a lecturer at Lennoxville, though her husband only has a part-
time job. Patricia is in the final stages of her PhD here\(^2\) & she & her husband have just bought one of the lovely old houses in Fredericton—a house next door but one to the one our second son, Peter, bought last summer. Peter is a great favourite with the students at FHS, & leads a creative writing group after school & plays hockey for a city team. Margaret is at Western this year completing her MLS, & hopes to get a job as a school librarian. Michael is in third year honours English, is still writing good poetry, & is applying for a Canada Council grant to help him complete another book this summer. Penny, the youngest, is in 1st year Arts, & has just acquired a new boy-friend—her main interest at the moment.

Glad to hear Australia is waking up to your presence & that offers are flowing in. I have now been asked to go to UPEI for an interview—they are looking for a new President, & since I love the Island I just might take it!

Keep in touch! And a deep soul kiss for Aviva!

Love,

Des

\(^1\)See 688.


703.[ppc]  
Perth, Australia  
March 19, 1974

Dear Desmond,

Am now in Perth to give 2 readings.\(^1\) I had a fantastic time at the Festival where I met scores of Australian writers. All the young poets sound the same—very angry about something or other. But this is a "lucky country" so there isn’t much to be angry about—not genuinely. I don’t think they’d recognize a poem if they saw one. Formless rhetoric. But the disease is overtaking all countries, one after the other. Who today would be brave enough to define a poem? Even the academics are running for shelter. So passes a glory...

Much love,

Irving

\(^1\)Irving Layton, poetry readings, Australian Writers’ Festival, Perth, March 1974.

704.[ppc]  
Lesbos Mithymna Greece,  
[August 12, 1974pm]

The Castle\(^1\)

They who built this castle  
did they in its spacious courtyards dance  
and did their fine ladies  
display bejewelled hands?
Where are the fine ladies now
and where are their gallants?
All are gone, my love, all
grey dust under your heel.

From this distant hill
the ruins look like a trepanned skull
that mocks brides and fishermen
and even the stars and the sun.

And you and all fine ladies
May see at any hour
the ironic scraping sand
dance in each crumbling tower.

Irving Layton
Mithymna, Lesbos.

PS Hope you’ve had a great summer. Love to Mary.


705. September 6, 1974
Dear Irving,

I see from a review in the Globe & Mail\footnote{Alan Pearson, "Gardener vs. Gartersnapper rev. of The Pole-Vaulter by Irving Layton and Fire on Stone by Ralph Gustafson, Globe and Mail 31 August 1974: 29.} that your new book of poems is out. But where are you? I haven’t heard from you for months. Have you cut me out of your will or something?

After turning down the presidency of the University of Victoria earlier this summer, Mary & I left in mid-July for a month’s holiday in the UK. Since getting back I’ve been busy catching up with all the work that accumulated in my absence.

My book of short stories is supposed to be out this month, & the Grove letters are in press at U of T.\footnote{See 684.5.} The Roberts’ Letters & Collected Poems are progressing.

Any chance of our getting together soon? How’s Aviva? Give her a big hug for me.

Love,
Des Pacey

706.[pc] September 18, 1974
Dear Desmond,

I’m back in harness and the saddle-sores are as painful as ever. After freedom and the Greek sun, Toronto and York are hard to take. But I’m settling in and my spirits are
high. Each year that goes by, I love myself more and more. I wrote several lovely poems this summer, which I’ve put into a book that will be published next month in Athens, that I’m calling Seventy-Five Greek Poems (1951-1974). All my summer’s work will be in it, excepting an excellent lyric "O Jerusalem" which doesn’t fit in... I’m surprised to learn from you that you haven’t had any communication from me. I’ve sent you several pc’s from Molibos, including one that had my "Castle" poem that I wrote out especially for you and Mary. I’ll be heartbroken to learn that you didn’t receive it. The War scare2 may have had something to do with your not getting any mail from me. When are you coming this way again? There’s no one Aviva and myself would get more pleasure from seeing than you and Mary. Migod it’s almost 20 years that we got to know one another.3 That old, lovely, sad chestnut comes to mind: How time flies! Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

1Irving Layton, "O Jerusalem," For My Brother Jesus 11.

2See 707.1.

3Pacey and Layton met in June of 1955 (see 2).
It does seem a terribly long time since we met—-I feel a yearning to clasp you & Aviva closely to my bosom! Especially Aviva, of course, who would be a softer hug than you, you great bear!

Hugs, as you say!

As ever,
Des P

1On July 15 a military coup led by Greek officers of the Cypriot National Guard overthrew the government of President Makarios, which was followed five days later by a Turkish invasion of Cyprus; this in turn quickly led to the end of military dictatorship in Greece and the formation of a civilian government on July 24; peace talks between Greece and Turkey opened in Geneva a day later.


October 4, 1974

Dear Desmond,
I’ve just returned from BC where I gave two readings in Vancouver and two more at Victoria.1 At Simon Fraser and UBC the large lecture halls—more appropriate for the dissection of a frog plus a lecture with coloured slides than a poetry reading—were both jampacked and filled to bursting. Students seemed to be standing on each other’s heads. It was a good thing my voice was in fine form or both would have been humiliating disasters. It’s a brutal thing to ask a poet to stand up in these huge impersonal halls to read his verses. Though afterwards everyone told me I had given magnificent readings, I felt terribly dissatisfied with them and with myself. The more involved and sincere the reader is, the more he comes across like an actor or performer, and can’t help himself from sounding phoney and affected. I’m glad the whole experience is behind me. On the other hand, the readings at Victoria were pure joy. One of them was at the local Art Gallery. I read mainly from The Pole-Vaulter, and I was gratified by the audience response to poems such as "The Final Solution,"2 "The Shadow",2 "Ventriloquist".3 I’ve put them into the new and enlarged Selected Poems that McStew is bringing out next spring.4

Did I tell you what my latest mishreggash (lunacy)5 is? It’s to reclaim Jesus for the Jews.6 In Victoria I fired the opening shot when I announced this intention of mine to a black-eyed cherub beauty who interviewed me for the Victoria Times.7 I don’t think she understood a single word I said but there’s just the possibility the lovely dumbbell will quote me verbatim. That would be good enough. If my remarks do get into the paper, they might make a lot of people mad, including my fellow-Jews, to whom Jesus is still a nasty word. But I’ve developed a strong feeling that something must at last be done about the prevailing smell of
hypocrisy that surrounds the entire Christian-Jew problem. Gentiles have got to be brought to their senses, or rather they've got to be brought to openly admit that on the question of Jesus’ Sonship to God and his Resurrection—for which Jews have been mercilessly persecuted for nearly 2000 years—they were WRONG and the Jews who stubbornly held to the view that Jesus was a mortal Jew no different from themselves were RIGHT. Do you believe that Jesus was the Son of God? Do you believe that he was resurrected? Do you believe that he has the power to release you from your sins? Did you raise your children to believe this nonsense? What I'm going to do is to get the whole matter into the open, because I don’t want Christian guilt feelings, hypocrisy, etc to lead to any more exterminations of a people both innocent and as supremely gifted as the Jews have shown themselves over the difficult persecuting centuries to be. Presumably I must have been born circumcized for a purpose after all! I’ll make Canucks take note of my prick as I’ve made them take note of my poetry.

Hugs,
Irving


1Irving Layton, poetry reading, University of British Columbia, 1 October 1974
Layton, poetry reading, Simon Fraser University, 1 October 1974.
Layton, poetry reading, University of Victoria, 2 October 1974.

2See 691.9.


5Yiddish: nonsense.

6This is the theme of Layton’s next volume For My Brother Jesus (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976).

7The only interview to appear in either of Victoria’s dailies was Bill Lever’s in the Victoria Colonist; Layton’s remarks may have been deemed too controversial for publication, or he may be thinking of Susan Merten’s interview in the Vancouver Sun.
Hi--Did you receive my letter and a copy of *The Pole-Vaulter*? I mailed them early last week.

Tonight I’m off to give a reading in Montreal and begin my series of lectures at the Sadye Bronfman Centre (also in Montreal) on Briefesr Fiction. Excelsior!

I hope you like "Flytrap". I Keep well. All good things to you and Mary. Hugs, Irving

enclosure: ts "The Flytrap"


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Dear Irving,

Thank you for your letter of October 4, and for the copy of your *Pole-Vaulter*. I have now read the book, & there is certainly no evidence of a slackening of power. Also, one of your cards from Greece has recently arrived--that containing the poem "The Castle".

Sorry you weren’t here over the weekend for the conference of the League of Canadian Poets. The place was literally crawling with them--F.R. Scott, P.K. Page, Dorothy Livesay, Miriam Waddington, Ralph Gustafson, John Glassco etc etc. I managed to get to some of the readings & greatly enjoyed them.

My book of selected short stories--*Waken, Lords & Ladies Gay*--has just come from Ottawa University Press, with a most flattering introduction. I only have one copy so far, but others are on the way & I’ll send you one in the near future. My stories in German translation are selling like hot cakes in Germany & Austria, too.

Have just come out of a meeting of the Board of Governors so am very tired--but it was great to hear from you & I’ll keep in touch.

Love to Aviva.

As ever, Des

---

The sixth annual meeting of the League of Canadian Poets was held 11-13 October 1974 in Fredericton.

strongest books & makes it perfectly clear that you have not suffered any loss of insight or energy.

Also enjoyed reading the poems selected from that book for the Canadian Forum—although I thought the Forum cover hideous and an insult to your handsome phiz! 

Hope my book of stories reached you. I enclose a clipping re my University Professorship.

Love to Aviva!

Des


2The front cover of the October 1974 Canadian Forum features a Bernie Krill sketch of a sceptred Layton in a Superman suit reading poems to a crowned pig perched on his knee.

712.

Dear Desmond,

My warmest thanks for your book of short stories. Gawd, I didn’t know you’d written as many as 31.  That’s exactly 21 more than I’ve written, and probably as many as any who’ve recently been making waves. I hope WLLG gives you the appreciation and prominence your fine stories merit for you. I think I’ll take several of them in my Briefer Fiction course and get my students to give "The Picnic", "The Boat", "The Trespasser", and some of my other favorites the ‘boring’ attention I demand they give the stories of Chekhov and Lawrence. Along with FMT, I also hope you’ll soon have more time to write your fine and moving stories, and that one day they’ll all be collected into one remarkable volume.

And thanks for the photo of yourself receiving the accolades you also so well deserve. You once told me you had had a good life, and looking over the long impressive list of your accomplishments, who could venture to take issue with you? I’ll pay you the highest compliment that a Jew ever pays another human being: You’re a mensch! Ask the local rabbi what that means, if the expression is foreign to you.

Pat Lane was here this afternoon to give a reading.  I was unable to be present, since I have my large class in Poetry at noon, which was the hour fixed for his reading. Aviva and Eli Mandel were both present, however, and both were very impressed by his new poems. I spotted Lane years ago, when I persuaded my Workshop to give him the York Workshop Award. Since then he’s gone from strength to strength. It’s a pity he’s always hard up for money, having a wife and an 8-month son to keep (second family), and must work as an apple-picker or a lumberjack in order to survive and buy some time for writing. The Canada Council should give him a lifetime pension...
I leave for Italy on the 25th of November, to give readings in Milan, Venice, Rome and Florence. It’s the spin-off from the Italo-English Selected Poems published by Eriandi Press. Now someone is working on a French translation, which is scheduled for publication some time in 1975. Maybe I’ll be invited to give a reading in the Sorbonne and get to sleep in the bed of Madame de Pompadour. Much love to Mary. Take care of yourself.

Hugs,
Irving.


1"Fortunately for Canadian letters Professor Pacey has found time to write and publish thirty-one delightful short stories to date, twelve of which have been selected for this series." Frank N. Tierney, "Introduction," Waken Lords and Ladies Gay 9.

2Frank N. Tierney, "Introduction:" "Let us wish and hope, then, that Professor Pacey’s duties will allow time for more stories so that we can continue to share in his joyful creative experiences and his enlightened view of life." 15

3Yiddish: a true man, a man of good character.

4Pat Lane, poetry reading, York University, Toronto, 6 Nov. 1974.

5See 632.3.

6Irving Layton, poetry readings, Milan, Venice, Rome and Florence


8This project was not realized.

November 17, 1974

Dear Irving,

I’m afraid my hand-writing won’t be very clear, as I’ve just finished writing a 17 page speech which I am to deliver at the 150th anniversary of the Fredericton Society of St Andrew. I’m dealing with the subject in 3 parts—(1) The World, & especially Europe, in 1824—& where it’s gone since; (2) Fredericton in 1824; (3) The St Andrew’s Society in 1824 & since. It has taken quite a lot of research but should make a good speech.

But, having just finished the first draft of the speech, I do want to drop you a line & thank you for the kind words about my stories in your letter of November 6. I’m glad you like them, though a bit surprised that the ones you mention are all early stories. I think that some of the later ones, especially "On the Roman Road" and "When She Comes Over" (in their very different ways) are at least as good as things like "The Boat" & "The Trespasser".
I do hope I get some encouragement from reviewers etc. I have ideas for about 12 more stories jotted down, but when nobody seems to care a damn about my stories it is difficult to work up the enthusiasm required to write more. Am I completely mad to think that the best of my stories are little classics? By God, when I read them over I keep being surprised at how good they are—am I nuts, or are people like Weaver who ignore them the nuts?

I'm delighted to hear of the Italian & French translations of your poems. You certainly richly deserve such translation, & I'm sure the books will be well received. And do have fun in Italy!

When will you be getting back from Italy? Keep me posted, as I should come to Toronto some time soon to talk to U of T Press about illustrations etc for my edition of Grove letters, & I want to see you when I come.

Give my love to Aviva. What's she up to these days? Is she as beautiful as ever? And how's young David? And Max? My Michael is still working day & night on his poems—but to the neglect of his university essays, I fear. He seems to feel, poor misguided wretch, that poetry is more important than first class honours.

The Pacey family is becoming quite a propertied clan. Mary Ann & her husband have just this week bought an old house on George St here—the third house the kids have bought in the past year. All three of the houses go back to the early 19th Century & need a great deal of restoration—but they seem to love restoring them & filling them up slowly with New Brunswick antique furniture which they pick up at auctions & restore too.

Well, you're a great man & a great friend & it's been great knowing you!

Love,
Des


December 5, 1974

Dear Desmond,

A brief note to tell you I've just returned from a reading tour in Italy where I read at Milan, Vicenza and Venice. In Venice, an exceptional honour was given me since I was asked to read in the Hall of Mirrors where my predecessors were Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. I had a fantastic time during the week I spent in Italy—receptions and interviews, countesses at my side, and beautiful Italian women purring over my metaphors as if they were the biceps of Hercules or Atlas. There's a strong likelihood I'll be going back to Italy in the spring for readings in Rome, Padua and Spoleto. All this, of course, is a spin-off from the publication of Il Freddo Verte Elemento (The Cold Green Element) the Eng Italian Selected Poems which Eriandi
brought out. I’ll send you a copy—or have I already done so?

Did you see the film *Lacombe, Lucien*? Don’t miss it. I was so infuriated by the bat-eyed review that appeared in the Toronto newspaper, that I wrote the enclosed letter. I’m also enclosing a poem which I wrote in Milano. Aviva sends you hugs and kisses.

Yassu,
Irving

PS Love to Mary. I’m going to spend the weekend with your stories.


1Pound lived in Venice for several years and Eliot visited him there, but I have not found any record of either giving a reading there.

2Irving Layton, poetry reading, Padua Italy...


4Irving Layton, "For Francesca," *For My Brother Jesus* 50.

December 16, 1974
Dear Irving,

Thanks for your letter and enclosures of December 5. I was delighted to hear how well things went in Italy. You didn’t send me a copy of the Italian edition of your work. I didn’t see the film you mention either. I doubt whether it has been to Fredericton yet.

I like the Milano poem very much indeed. I hope you got together eventually with Francesca!

I hope to come to Toronto in mid-January, & hence to see you & Aviva. I must come, in fact, to make a final selection of photographs for inclusion in the book of Grove letters.

Still saddled with constant meetings on tenure etc here, but am hoping against hope to get some short stories written over the Christmas break.

I suppose I have told you of the arrival of our first grandson—Peter’s son—on Nov. 21?1 He is a great little fellow, & his name is Simon Peter Desmond Pacey.

Hate writing you a rushed note like this but am fearfully busy.

Counted your letters to me the other day—over 600 since 1955!2

As ever,
(& love to Aviva!) Des

1Simon Peter Desmond Pacey was born on November 21, 1974.
Pacey is referring to a typescript catalogue of his Irving Layton correspondence, presumably prepared by one of his graduate students; it consists of 22 pages with 25 items on each page (22x25=550)—Pacey has written on the front "c. 550 letters." This catalogue, however, lists clippings, poems and copies of some of Pacey's letters to Layton, so that the actual number of Layton's letters to Pacey is 450.

716.[cc] [c December 24, 1974]

Dear Desmond,

One week down and another to go—-I mean of the hols. What a week it has been, too. Poor Aviva was busy serving out-of-town guests, let me count 'em, five, no, six who stayed with us several days, including my son, Max. Delightful company, and we stayed up till 3 AM talking about everything under the sun. Max is as fond of speaking his piece as his old man, so we had some wonderful talks. While here he wrote two fine poems, and I was turned on to write a marvellous poem which I think I'll mail off to Playboy.1 I'll send you a copy of the poem after the New Year's been properly welcomed in, & also a copy of a poem I wrote when I was in Milano.2 I believe you'll like both poems.

I hope you've had lots of Xmas cheer, with all the Paceys sitting around the table for the traditional turkey and goose, and yourself in great carving form. Merely imagining the scene gives me a pleasurable thrill. I know how much satisfaction it must give you and Mary to have your offspring with you on an occasion such as this.

Any chance of your coming to Toronto one of these days? It seems so long since Aviva and I clapped eyes on your roguish grin.

Shalom, Irving

PS All good things, to you and yours, for 1975, health, love, many, many joys. Hugs & kisses for Mary.

1Irving Layton, "Anio, Amas, Tit Loves an Ass;" see 719.

2For Francesca."

717.[cc] [late December, 1974]

Greetings and best wishes from Des & Mary Pacey! We hope 1975 will be a great year for the Laytons.

I spent two of my summer holidays from school in the nearest of these old thatched cottages,1 just before coming to Canada in 1931. My Mother was then District nurse in Linton. I used to spend hours bouncing a ball off that chimney--& can still recall the lovely fragrance of that little garden, with its hollyhocks, roses & lavender.

As ever,

DP

1Mary Pacey had sketched this cottage in Linton during their British holiday in 1973 (see 693) and reproduced the sketch for the annual family Christmas card in 1974.
Dear Irving,

Thanks very much for your Christmas card and its note.

Glad you enjoyed your Christmas visit from Max, & that he is still writing poems and motivated you to do the same.

As you know, I had set my heart on writing some short stories over the holidays, & I did manage to get one finished and another, longer, one about half written (19 pp so far). The first one hasn’t been typed yet—when it is I will send you a copy. Meanwhile, I look forward to getting a copy of your Playboy poem, & the Milano one.

Do you know anyone who might translate some of my stories into Italian? I’m having such success in Germany, Austria & Switzerland with the German versions that I’m moved to try other fields to conquer.

We did have a very good family time over Christmas. For Christmas dinner we had six of our "children", three of their spouses, & our two grandchildren—twelve at table plus the new grandson in his crib. For New Year’s dinner we had the same group plus Rick Adams & his wife—Rick is Peter’s friend who is writing the PhD thesis on your early work.

We plan to be in Toronto, arriving the evening of Thursday Jan 23 & staying at the Park Plaza. Friday morning I shall be at the U of T Press re illustrations etc for my Grove Letters book, but we’re still free for Friday afternoon and evening. Saturday we’re moving on to Simcoe to see Grove’s old farmhouse, then to Mary’s father’s place for Sunday, then to Ottawa for a meeting on Monday. When can we see you?

Had a nice letter from Al Purdy yesterday—he wants me to autograph some of my books for him. Also a nice note from Dorothy Livesay about my stories, which she enjoyed.

Hugs to you, you old bear, and more intimate fondlings of your delightful wife!

As ever,
Des P

1Desmond Pacey, "The Blue Souwester," unpublished.

2Susan (Gillis) Adams (b. 1949), criminologist, wife of Rick Adams.


4Al Purdy, letter to Desmond Pacey, 27 December 1974, Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.

5Dorothy Livesay, Christmas card to Desmond Pacey, undated (December 1974), Pacey Papers, National Archives of Canada.
Dear, desist and do not prod
My poor, meek and stumbling rod;
Rub it, stroke it, kiss away
It will not be your joy today.
For, since I love you I hold back
The forceful entry of your crack:
To spare your life though I burn
Is my sweet and grave concern,
Knowing my tool’s thrust and rage
Would slay you though half my age.
O should I push your legs apart
My tool would engage your heart
Perforate each smoke-lined lung
And come out a second tongue
Or, such is its monstrous size,
Loose the fastenings of your eyes.
My great vainglorious fool
Flee not my too listless tool
Or shed hypocritic tears
Over my wintery years
Nor once doubt my desires
Are fed by telluric fires.
It is that my love’s too deep
That I put my lust to sleep
And forbid its raging strength
To show along my yard’s length
That deaf to shout, shriek or grunt
Would tear your delicate cunt,
So enlarge that savory hole
’Twould lust for telephone pole
Make misers journey to hold
Within it their bags of gold
And crazy admirals think
Whole armadas there to sink.
As saints have died, it is true
Love shrivels my love for you
Knocks my fireman’s helmet down
To mock me with this battered crown
Till I rave, curse and bless my fate
And moan at heaven’s own gate:
From love alone, love’s fine care
Low lies my cock, white is my hair.

Irving Layton

Dear Desmond,

Many warm thanks for your card and letter. Congrats to you on becoming a "zaida". Ask your Jewish friends what the word means. This must be a proud and happy moment for you and Mary. Tonight I shall toast a l’chaim" to you and the three generations of Pacey. May the years rain down blessings on all of you.
I’m glad you like my Adam poem. The above poem is to convince you that the ‘old Adam’ is not yet dead in me, that I’m still able to rip off a wild piece of salacity along with a piece of ass. Don’t let the above sad tale fool you. For the sake [of] a good poem, I’ll tell any sort of lie—even the most incredible.

Love to Mary. Come soon.

Hugs,
Irving


2Yiddish: grandfather.

3Yiddish: to life (a traditional toast).

January 28, 1975

It was great seeing you and Mary, and both of you looking like a pair of flourishing young lovers. I still marvel at how you have found the time to do all the many excellent things you’ve done. I’m lost in wonder, truly, and admiration. Write when you can. Take care of yourself.

Love to Mary.

Hugs, Irving


1Misdated 1974.


January 31, 1975

Dear Irving & Aviva,

I write to thank you most sincerely for your hospitality to Mary & me in Toronto a week ago. Aviva’s food was scrumptious, and I thought we had a very good talk. I’m afraid I ran out of steam towards the end, as a result of a very hectic day in which I had literally run from appointment to appointment, but until fatigue overtook me I thought we had one of our best sessions ever.

I also want to thank you for the clippings & "The Shark." I greatly enjoyed Aviva’s review of Patrick White—very nicely-phrased & clearly argued. And I think "The Shark" is one of your best poems—to me its impact was far more powerful for its quiet, casual manner and tone. I predict it will become one of your most anthologized pieces.
The rest of our trip went off well, but when I got back to my office Wednesday morning I found a great pile of paper from which I have not yet extricated myself.

Lots of love to you both!

As ever,
Des
York University,
Downsview, Ont.
March 24, 1975

Dear Desmond,

Please forgive my long silence. But I’ve really been in the soup these past few weeks—readings, lectures and a whole lot of time-and-energy-consuming whatnots. Tomorrow I’m off to Windsor to give a reading at the university, and I have several more scheduled for April. I’m also in the midst of my campaign to reclaim Jesus for the Jews—the Romans and some Jews may have nailed him to the Cross, but the Christians have left him hanging there—and this also has bitten heavily into my meagre capital of time.

The Unwavering Eye will be out by the end of this month. I’ve received my author’s copies and I’ll mail you one some time this week. It’s a fine-looking volume but has its usual number of heart-breaking typos.

Be well. My warmest affection to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

[April 8, 1975pm]
Dear Desmond,

About ten days ago I sent you a copy of The Unwavering Eye. I hope you received it. I also sent a pc. If you haven’t answered, it might be because, like myself, at this time of the year you’re drowning in a sea of paper. Gawd, will I [be] happy when this month is over and I can spread my wings for Greece.

Hugs, Irving


April 23, 1975
Dear JAB:

Warmest thanks for your enthusiastic note of acceptance. Amidst the litter of mail that surrounds me on my return from Montreal, what a marvellous way to start the morning.

Sure, go ahead and make whatever changes you think necessary. I have changed the title from SARDONICUS etc to FOR MY NEIGHBOURS IN HELL: the Satires and Epigrams of Irving Layton. M&S are bringing out another book this
September titled THE DARKENING FIRE; Selected Poems 1945-1968.

I'm worried about Desmond Pacey. I sent him a copy of The Unwavering Eye as well as several notes but I haven't heard a peep from him. I hope he's not unwell. Please say hello for me when you see him. Thanks.

Best wishes,
Irving Layton

1John A. Brebner (b. 1972), Assistant Professor of English 1973-76 at UNB and a founder and editor of Iconomatrix, a literary magazine which appeared twice (1975-76); the first issue included Layton's "Adam," "Adonis," "Amo Anas Tit Loves an Ass," "Desmond Pacey: In Memoriam" "For Edda," "Saint Pinchas," and "True Love" (21-5).

Layton used the title For My Neighbours in Hell for a volume of new poems published in 1980 by Mosaic in Oakville.

April 25, 1975.

Professor Irving Layton
Department of English
York University
Downsview, Ontario
Dear Professor Layton,

Yesterday I found the attached letter\(^1\) folded under The Unwavering Eye. I mentioned it to Dr. Pacey and he suggested that I send it off to you with a note of explanation.

Dr. Pacey has been absent from the office since the afternoon of April 3, because of an ailment to the inner ear, causing dizziness and nausea. The recovery is slow in such cases, and it now appears that he will not be back at his desk for another two weeks or so. However, he is being kept informed of the activities in his office and all personal mail is delivered to him daily.

I'm sure he will be resuming his regular correspondence with you as soon as he feels well enough.

Yours sincerely,
(Mrs) Vera Downing\(^2\), Secretary

1Fugitive.

2Vera Downing (1920-90), Pacey's head secretary from 1969-75.

June 11, 1975

Dear Desmond,

I hope this card finds you up and around. The last time I phoned, Michael said you were out of the hospital and on the way to recovery. Will a bag of Grk sunlight help? I'm on an island I've not been to before, very green and very quiet. I've been writing a lot, two or three which, if you see JAB, tell him I might send to Iconomatrix. I've
written an hilarious satire on St Peter in the Basilica\textsuperscript{1}
which he'll like, I think, very much. Please look "after"
yourself--I miss your grin. Love to Mary.

Hugs,
Irving

727.
June 19, 1975
Dear Dr Layton,

Your postcard to Dr Pacey arrived this morning. I am
sorry to say that he is back in hospital again and that his
recovery has been much too slow. However, I took your card
to the hospital and read it to him--it did cheer him up.

Brebner and I are of course delighted to know about
your forthcoming contributions to \textit{Iconomatrix}.

Best regards,
Yours sincerely
JC Mahanti\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1}Jogesh C. Mahanti, Professor of English at the Central Institute of English and Foreign
Lanaguages, Hyderabad, India; Pacey's longtime research assistant, co-editor of \textit{Iconomatrix}.

728.\textsuperscript{ts}
June 27, 1975
Dear Desmond:

Since the mails are more reliable here than back home,
there's a hope possible that you've been receiving my
postcards. I mailed you one recently from Athens where I'm
still sojourning, holed up in my favorite hotel, Phaedra,
almost directly below the Acropolis. From my window I have
a clear view of it, looking as if asking to be photographed
though with an absence of smugness, if not entirely of self—
consciousness. After all it has been standing in the same
place for nearly 2500 years. I'm in Athens by myself, Aviva
and David having gone to Spain where I shall join them at
the end of July. After nine months in the twin harness of
domesticity and York, I need these [weeks] of privacy and
solitude and I'm thankful for them. Since touching Medit
soil I've written steadily, so that I'm now well into
another book. Yesterday I mailed six poems to Bob Weaver
for the Fall issue of \textit{Tam Review}.\textsuperscript{1} The longest of them,
eighty lines, is titled "Jeshua" (Hebrew for Jesus) and is
probably the strongest thing I'll do this summer since it's
a poem that's been boiling up in my mind for a very long
time. There are several poems in the batch I sent him of
the sort that you were the only critic in Canada to write
about appreciatively. Migawd, what would I have done
without those friendly reviews of yours when everyone else
in the country seemed eager to get in the first clout? I
shall always remember gratefully your unfaltering
encouragement and the friendship that went with it, neither
of them, thank heaven, wholly blind to my large faults.
But you had the wisdom or kindness to pay no mind to my
occasional ravings and rantings, but kept an alert ear for
the lower registers, knowing the high ones false and not truly me. Maybe because I’ve been so much alone I’m dwelling on the past and recalling things but I remember that once I sent you one of my ‘nasty specials’—the nastiness wasn’t directed at yourself but at others or at the world—and you wrote back that there were aspects of me that weren’t as attractive as some other aspects were. The rebuff stung me at the time, but that was right at the beginning of our correspondence. 1957? 1958? I was teaching at Herzliyah then, so it must have been around then. It stung but it was as beneficial as an anti-tetanus injection. It made me take a closer look at myself and to be on my guard against those rages which brought me sometimes very near to madness itself. For that and many other blessings too numerous to tabulate I owe you much, Desmond. Hell, I’d better stop right here or I’ll become mawkish. Here’s a poem I just wrote.

*True Love*

She pleased me in a thousand ways  
With embrace and passionate kiss;  
    Soft was her breast, smooth her thigh  
Honey was her amorous kiss.

But with loving rare in woman  
Most she enchanted me that day  
When packing her panties and pills  
Knew when to take herself away.

And here’s another which you might like even more:

*Adonis*

My darling and I made love  
in the washroom of the Adonis  
and ship and I were as one  
as we rocked and ploughed the furrows.

Layton rides again. Heh, heh. I can hear your chuckling as you read them, and can see the lecherous grin on your lips preparatory to your smacking them. That’s what I allus loved about you, you never did the dirt on either life or sex. Your celebration of both, besides your constant horniness, is what endeared you to me. It was what brought and kept us together all these many wonderful years of friendship and affection. God bless.

Irv

PS Best love to Mary. I’ll probably make for an island in a couple of days.

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Layton is thinking of a Pacey review rather than a Pacey letter; "Irving Layton is a man of many masks. He can be tender, sensual, arrogant, self-pitying, humorous, coarse... I like the sensual Layton almost as well as the tender Layton... Embedded in this otherwise fine poem, however, is a trace of the angry Layton whom I don't always like." Desmond Pacey, rev. of *The Bull Calf*; *The Fiddlehead* 29 (August 1956): 30-32.

3 Irving Layton; "True Love," *For My Brother Jesus* 61.


729. Hydra, Greece
July 12, 1975

Dear Mary,

I found your telegram waiting for me at the American Express when I came there to pick up my mail. Aviva had written me earlier that Desmond's condition was critical but I was not prepared for the shock of those bleak clearly printed words on the small sheet of paper I held in my hand announcing his death. That was a black hour for me and I still haven't absorbed the fact that I've lost forever one of my dearest friends. My mind and heart have been with him ever since, as I re-live my memories of him going back nearly two decades. It gives me some small comfort to know that my last letter reached him and that I was in his thoughts at the end as he was in mine. He was a beautiful man with a rare mixture of compassion, insight, magnanimity and humour whose continuing friendship and loyalty helped me when my own psychic underpinnings seemed to be slipping away from me.

Aviva and I both loved him deeply. It makes me cry like a child when I think I shall never again see him come through our door with that broad, inimitable grin on his face that seemed to light up every nook and cranny of our parlour, or that we shall never again hear his throaty chuckle when anyone of us said something that struck him as funny. It was a privilege and our good fortune to have known Desmond all these years and to have had him for a friend.

I think I know what you have been going through these past few months and my deepest feelings of sympathy and concern are with you and your children in this sad hour of loss. Remembering the grief I felt when my mother died I shan't try to offer the usual words of consolation--the acute pain I felt didn't leave me for months and I still feel stabblings whenever her image comes into my mind. When one lives into his sixth decade as I have, one realizes that one lives with ghosts, some more vital than others.

I wrote the enclosed poem several days ago. It will be in my next book which I think will be published in Feb or March. I'm dedicating the book to the dear memory of my friend. Desmond doesn't need any memorials by me or by anyone else, having built his own but I want the dedication to be a testimonial to a wonderful friendship which endured
for so long and was so creative. Perhaps in an age when words like love, creativity and friendship have seemingly gone out of circulation, the record of our friendship will provide some people with comfort and hope.

Aviva is in Spain, and I shall be leaving here to meet up with her. We’ll phone you when we return in September. Take care of yourself Mary. All my thoughts are with you.

Love,
Irving

In Memoriam

I saw a June bug
hazarding a slow imprudent march
across the traffic-lined street

What impelled it to leave
the curb’s security
to make its brave, ludicrous, clumsy way
to the other side?

The Shavian Life Force? Kismet?
Curiosity?
Bah, death whenever and however merely completes the cycle of unreason

I cheered it as if
it had been entered in the Derby

Dear friend, you didn’t make it
to the other side either
though you had the sweetest lecherous grin
on the face of any man I’d ever known
when you copped a feel

No one, alas, ever does

A lousy crab bore down on you
and flattened you out
despite my stricken outcries
of rage and love

But you were carrying
an armful of superb books
when you were struck down
and they are scattered
among the stars

1Layton’s For My Brother Jesus is dedicated “To the Memory of Desmond Pacey.”