

Notes and Comments

'We must hold each other's hands from afar.'

*A correspondence
Herbert A. Kenny
and Patricia Buckley Bozell*

Introduction

Sometime in the late fifties I saw in *The Catholic World* an essay by Herbert Kenny evaluating, and acclaiming, the work of Hilaire Belloc. I thought it so good, so singular, I wrote him a letter which reached him in Boston, where he worked for the *Boston Globe*. He wrote back, pleased but also amused. He reported that he had received two letters applauding that piece, the other from Reid Buckley of Camden, South Carolina—were we related?

Yes, I said; and some time soon thereafter, I visited him. And, the following summer, he and his wife Teresa sailed with me and my wife Pat on my cutter for several days in Cape Cod. The friendship lasted forty-five years, during which Herb, a political liberal and adamant Democrat, served as book editor, and cultural editor, for the *Boston Globe*. He also wrote novels, essays, and poetry, served as chairman of writers' conferences, brought up three children, and engaged from time to time in editorial advice to authors, including Reid Buckley, who had published two novels and was at work on his latest book, *USA Today*.

It was late in the nineties that Kenny sent a translation he had done of Dante's *Divine Comedy* to another Buckley. Trish Bozell, who had served as managing editor of *Triumph*, founded and edited by her husband,

Brent Bozell, was doing editorial work for the Regnery Publishing Company. Herb Kenny thought his translation distinctive and asked Trish Bozell to read it and give her judgment of it.

She read it, and thought it superb. A correspondence ensued. It was sustained by, indeed buoyed by, a religious faith, which she and Herb shared, and an anxiety to relate that faith to memories and experiences. Herb's wife had died on January 19, 1997, Brent's 71st birthday. Brent died three months later, on April 15.

The correspondence was sustained but what we have is irregular. Trish and Herb always answered each other's letters but didn't always keep copies. What we have here is a substantial portion of a correspondence which those of us who have read it deem a work of devotional art.

William F. Buckley Jr.

Herbert Kenny writes from his home in Manchester, Mass., to thank Patricia Bozell for a note expressing her interest in his translation of The Divine Comedy.

To PBB

No Catholic publishing house in America offers a translation of *The Divine Comedy*, but I've been unable to shame them into doing much. I can't tell you how heartening your interest and praise of the work has been to me.

To PBB

But the weather here has been grand, my health holds up, my older daughter got a job teaching French (after years as a teacher's aide), and, as they say, life is beautiful.

To PBB

I'm sure I will find it [an unpublished novel] in time. I live in a tumble of

books and manuscripts. I throw nothing out. They say that novels take on a life of their own, but this one has gone too far. Happy Thanksgiving to you; enjoy the day. The communion of saints will be beside us both.

To PBB

You are at the core of the mystery with the phrase—the “joy in suffering”—because we are constantly under the obligation to be joyful. And suffering, as you say, can become a transcending experience only if it is rooted in love, the love of God and his creatures, conjoined somehow with the suffering of Christ.

Teresa had a great little card printed up that she gave to friends and acquaintances. It bore a quotation from St. Augustine, “If you ask whether a particular man is good, the answer depends not on what he believes or hopes, but on what he loves.”

I believe that the worst suffering is watching the suffering of someone we love and being unable to help. I enclose a poem of my own which touches on these matters. I do think we understand each other on a profound level, and so I say to you Rejoice! We'll all be together in paradise in God's good time. It's really a wonderful world.

Timberline

*Still in the still room the solitary sleeper
and the corpus on the cross more alive,
the electric dock the only steady weeper;
the women in the kitchen as a hive,*

*The boy stood and looked down on his
father
all his worlds looked up to heretofore
and the old man seemed the same or
rather*

*whiter and he did not laugh or snore,
The laced lips straight without the twist
of wit,
the eyes chaste against the lust of
learning
as if at last they knew the better of it
and saw death only worth the wear of
earning.*

*The boy thought first a prayer could sit
it upright
and make it man again and would have
said
the prayer twice over in the aching
night
but found a fitness in his father dead,*

*a buried splendor in austere arrangement
tiny beside death's magnitude he found it
and saw for the first time in his growth's
estrangement
time's mountain and the way things
creep
around it.*

To HK

I've begun by doing the inexcusable—answering a letter by return mail. But I needed to, for since my return from France, my mind has been brimming over with thoughts you've sparked.

For the first time, after reading your letter and poetry, I felt I was beginning to blend the two realities I've been living with since Brent's death. The first is the everyday chat and business of living, laughing, planning, and working. The other is living still with my Brent, not daring to think too closely of my love lest I break apart, as I tend to do—and I'm too much an Anglo to approve of that. Living this way, I could go to France for a week and enjoy myself as I did, while crying inside. The only outward manifestation I could note during the trip was a terrible absent-mindedness. I didn't like it; it was/is

like living a lie.

You've broken that Manichean-like trance. I've allowed Brent to seep into the now without hurting too much, although I'll go slowly. The thought of "all of us being together in paradise in God's good time" is heartening. The punch is your following line—"It's really a great world." That ties in with the gratitude owed God, which, though I imbibe all his goodness and ask for more, please, I seldom stop to tender. Thinking too deeply on *that* one makes the blood run cold.

To PBB

God forbid that I should write a line that would make you gloomy, because I'm waiting for any one of so many things to happen that it is a consolation to me to write to you. Hilaire Belloc wrote and I love to quote it: "Ours from the very first beginning / On to the undiscovered ends / Nothing is worth the wear of winning / Save laughter and the love of friends."

My daughter Susan, who has endured a broken marriage and reared four children herself, lectured to me on God's sense of humor. "First," she says, "he made a horse, then amused himself by putting stripes on it, and we call it a zebra, and then he stretched its legs and its neck and made a giraffe!"

But let me share this with you as well. My son, Arby (who incidentally went to Georgetown and loves Washington), is a talented sculptor who carves in wood and last year won best in a show in all media at the Rockport Art Association. Another broken marriage, a heart too tender. An eccentric acquaintance drowned and he wrote this poem.

Dear Tom. Good Tom. Mad Tom.

Dead Tom.

*What god drowns a man so handsome
Crisply striding his own meridian,
Braving the coals of a grim quotidian?
Dry-eyed I can tell my daughter
In a better world, he'd have walked on
water.*

That last line when I first read it, and now, lifts me above mundane sorrow and somehow exalts me. I would hope it would dispel any bit of gloom you might have.

Somehow I remember Léon Bloy's line: "The only sorrow is not to be a saint." Belloc also wrote: "Kings live in palaces and pigs in sties / And youth in expectation. Youth is wise."

I live in expectation.

Forgive my garrulity, and remember, what somebody said of somebody else, deep down, I'm shallow.

To HK

I didn't mean to suggest, please believe me, that any of your letters made me sad. Quite the contrary, they lift and inspire. I think your son, Arby, takes after you. Not only in his poetry, but in his outlook.

GKC's belief about Christian optimism is somewhat expressed in what he says of the opposite—something along the lines of: "Calvinism is easily defined. Nothing could be simpler than saying that men go to Hell because God made them on purpose to send them to Hell."

My son-in-law, who deep down is not shallow, wrote me when Brent died: "After Kathy called to say that things [at the nursing home] had reached a crisis, one thought has haunted me: 'Precious in the eyes of God is the death of his holy ones.' I

have said to all whom I've talked to in the last three days: 'Death is a holy thing.' And this is not to say that I am in any way trying to canonize Brent. Haven't we learned from Mother Teresa that to God all of us are his 'holy ones'? I am simply saying that since Holy Saturday death has become a holy thing. The agony and the fear, which I think none of us will evade, partakes of and 'makes up for what is lacking in' the Cross—a never-to-be-plumbed mystery."

With which I leave the subject of death, gloomy or otherwise. But there is so much to be thankful for, and over and over again, amongst which is our friendship.

To PBB

I have just read Bill's *Nearer, My God* and am writing to you even before I write to him because I was profoundly moved by the account of your son's ordination in France and by the quotations Bill gave from his letters.

What a consolation, what a thrill it must be for you to have a son blessed with such a vocation! We move through life, at least I do, enveloped by the faith, conscious, of course, that there is a higher life, rather stupidly content, admiring the saints, praying to God to bring us smiling through each day, and then something touches us that rather lifts us out of our boots. Reading about your Michael did it for me, and when you write to him, please ask him to put me in his prayers, as I have now him and you and Bill and all the Buckleys in mine.

To PBB

Thank you very much for sending me Brent's words at the ordination. I

can understand perfectly the numinous magic of the day triumphing over weather, delays, cold food, and late arrivals. His words also had a magical quality.

I am young in heart and hope. I realize one of the difficulties with *Father, Forgive Me* [HK's unpublished novel] is that it is very Catholic in incident and in tone, and goes out into the secular world like a shorn lamb. There is no woman in it as a main character; the priest is a good man; and it deals (inadequately) with the mystery of evil. I may well mail the manuscript off to you, although I should warn you that dealing as it does with the hideousness of prison and a study of evil, the language on occasion is strong medicine indeed.

To HK

Your comments on Brent's comments captured those luminous days. It's the only time in my life I've ever been sharply aware of the existence among us of the Holy Spirit. If you'll pardon this effrontery, it was like a taste of Heaven. Everyone smiled, always, always; inane grins at everyday mishaps; instant friendships—that kind of thing.

The mystery of evil is a gripping subject. Bill, in his *Nearer, My God*, touches on it in his chapter on Lunn and Knox, but not really on the mystery so much as on its punishment. At any rate, I don't think I've ever read anything that deals specifically with the mystery of evil, and that sort of conjecture enralls me.

To PBB

I watched a good deal of television when the Pope was in Cuba and had to salute Fidel for his courteous and

considerate attitude toward John Paul. The whole episode reminded me of Macaulay's great tribute to the Church of Rome (which he thought somewhat benighted and inferior to Protestantism). I went off and copied it for my children and grandchildren, and enclose a copy. If you aren't familiar with it, you will enjoy it; if you are familiar with it, you can pass it along to a friend.

To PBB

As I wrote you, your Mass for my intentions came at the right time. I lived through my sister's death, my birthday, Christmas, and New Year's not at all dispirited, and socially very busy with family, relatives, and friends.

Two days before my sister died, a friend drove me to where she was living after having to leave her own house in Cape Cod. We brought a couple of bottles of champagne, got her out to lunch. She was 93 years old. Had a perfectly wonderful day in which her spirits and her wit were as sharp as ever. That night after retiring, she was stricken with a stroke. Hospital. In a coma. The next day awakened and talked about the wonderful day she had with me and my friends, and later that day died. If she could have orchestrated her death that would have been the way she would have limned it.

It didn't leave me sadder than any death would, but it seemed to immobilize me. But the other day I was driven to go to work on my monthly book review, and to get off a few lines to you to let you know that all is quite well with me and mine.

To HK

I caught my breath at the graphic

account of your sister's death. It never matters a hoot how old someone is, how infirm, how anything—when death comes, it hits in an almost mystical way. Death is mysterious, and wonderful—glorious, really, ever since the Resurrection. But it hurts. How wonderful that last memory of her—laughing and tasting the fullness of a life that has given life and love, and with you. Her gentle going fits.

I too—far less painfully—have lost another dear one. My Jamie—my youngest, who has lived with me since his birth, 32 years ago—is venturing to Cumberland, about 2 hours away, to live with the family of his fiancée and train for a new job. I want desperately for him to succeed (his Julie is perfect for him, rather simple, sweet, dependent) right along with missing him desperately—one of the many paradoxes of love. I'm convinced that God takes our dearest ones—you, your sister, me, various children—in order to draw us closer to Him. Which is right and just, good and proper. But it hurts.

To PBB

Two of your letters arrived at once, which raised my spirits. You are so right about death, mysterious and wonderful (even if untimely) when properly understood and when someone is spiritually prepared. Suffering is another story and another mystery, and watching friends suffer, vicariously so.

To PBB

I take such comfort in poetry that I have been tempted to put together an anthology entitled *Poems for the Bereaved*. I shan't do it, of course, because of laziness and the horror of having to write for permissions. This

all came to mind the other day when, prowling through the collected poems of Emily Dickinson, I came across a quatrain that I thought smacked of genius. Here it is, suiting, as I see it, your case and mine:

"If so divine a loss / We enter but the gain. / Indemnity for loneliness / That such a bliss has been."

What power packed in nineteen words! It would be hard, nay, impossible to do better. I thought I'd send it to you with Valentine greetings.

To HK

I have a friend, Martha O'Keefe, who discovered Emily Dickinson some 40 years ago, and she's been obsessed ever since. She's convinced that Dickinson was deep in John of the Cross and that her poetry is speckled with his theological wisdom. She pointed me to this poem, which seems to round out yours:

*The hallowing of Pain
Like hallowing of Heaven—
Obtains at a corporeal cost—
The Summit is not given
To Him who strives severe
At middle of the Hill—
But He who has achieved the Top—
All—is the price of All—*

Do you agree? The Walter de la Mare is as beautiful—haunting, lulling, eternal. Thank you.

Winter's all but gone, for which I thank the Lord. It was as drear as I'd dreaded, but spring is around and the days pass and the cheer peers out and warms to life. Thank God for God, and that Brent is now part of Him, and soon I part of them. Heresy? I don't think so, and I won't probe. It's

too comforting.

To PBB

Here's another from my book *Poems for the Bereaved*. It is by Chesterton.

*There is a place where lute and lyre are
broken
Where scrolls are torn and on a wild
wind go.
Where tablets stand wiped naked for a
token
Where laurels wither and the daisies
grow.*

*Lo, I too join the brotherhood of silence
I am Love's trappist and you ask in
vain
For man through love's gate even as
through death's gate
Goeth alone and comes not back again.*

*Yet here I pause, look back across the
threshold
Cry to my brethren though the world
be old,
Prophets and sages, questioners and
doubters,
O world, old world, the best hath
ne'er been told.*

I'm quoting from memory but I think I have it right. (P.S. Here is the Macaulay on the Catholic Church which I promised you):

October 1840: There is not, and there never was on this earth, a work of human policy so well deserving of examination as the Roman Catholic Church. The history of that Church joins together two great ages of human civilisation. No other institution is left standing which carries the mind back to the times when the smoke of sacrifice rose from the Pantheon, and when camelopards and tigers abounded in the Flavian amphitheatre.

theatre. The proudest royal houses are but of yesterday, when compared with the line of the Supreme Pontiffs. That line we trace back in an unbroken series, from the Pope who crowned Napoleon in the nineteenth century to the Pope who crowned Pepin in the eighth; and far beyond the time of Pepin the august dynasty extends, till it is lost in the twilight of fable. The republic of Venice came next in antiquity. But the republic of Venice was modern when compared with the Papacy; and the republic of Venice is gone, and the Papacy remains. The Papacy remains, not in decay, not a mere antique, but full of life and youthful vigour. The Catholic Church is still sending forth to the farthest ends of the world missionaries as zealous as those who landed in Kent with Augustine, and still confronting hostile kings with the same spirit with which she confronted Attila. The number of her children is greater than in any former age. Her acquisitions in the New World have more than compensated for what she has lost in the Old. Her spiritual ascendancy extends over the vast countries which lie between the plains of the Missouri and Cape Horn, countries which, a century hence, may not improbably contain a population as large as that which now inhabits Europe. The members of her communion are certainly not fewer than a hundred and fifty millions; and it will be difficult to show that all other Christian sects united amount to a hundred and twenty millions. Nor do we see any sign which indicates that the term of her long dominion is approaching. She saw the commencement of all the governments and of all the ecclesiastical establishments that now exist in the world;

and we feel no assurance that she is not destined to see the end of them all. She was great and respected before the Saxon had set foot on Britain, before the Frank had passed the Rhine, when Grecian eloquence still flourished in Antioch, when idols were still worshipped in the temple of Mecca. And she may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's.

To HK

What a magnificent quote from Macaulay. It reminds me a bit of this one from GKC on Orthodoxy:

People have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum, and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy. It was sanity: and to be sane is more dramatic than to be mad. . . . It is easy to be a madman; it is easy to be a heretic. It is always easy to let the age have its head; the difficult thing is to keep one's own. It is always easy to be a modernist; as it is easy to be a snob. . . . It is always simple to fall, there are an infinity of angles at which one falls, only one at which one stands. To have fallen into any one of the fads from Gnosticism to Christian Science would indeed have been obvious and tame. But to have avoided them all has been one whirling adventure; and in my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect.

But then one expects this wild and

wonderful enthusiasm from Chesterton. Your quote has the thump of the unexpected.

To PBB

Thanks ever so much for the copy of *LBB Memories* [a pamphlet put out by PBB on the death of her husband, Brent, April 15, 1997]; was thrilled by the core of the pamphlet—Brent's election by God for a very special life beyond our understanding. I read it all the way through until I came to my utter surprise to my own letter and my poem on my father's death. I was at once flattered and frightened; the poem seemed almost an intrusion. I consoled myself that you found it pertinent.

The next morning finished the book in tears, a tribute to a remarkable man. His suffering [physical and mental] would have been beyond my endurance; his profound faith, which seems to have had truly mystical moments, I can only envy. What can I know of such depths and heights whose life has moved serenely (and I am afraid stupidly) through the decades? God touched him in a special way; and he touched back. And yet, I know, it was the two of you.

To HK

What on earth is wrong with publishers [*Forgive me, Father* had been turned down again]? That goes for *The Philosopher* as well [another unpublished work]. Oh, well, maybe our time has passed, which is really too bad because I can't believe present tastes have bettered. I had always thought that the arts followed the political mores—certainly this appears to have been so in music—but currently it seems the other way around. In popular music, the rock craze—or was it Elvis?—started a gen-

eral slide in aesthetics and morals that seemed to me to have hit bottom years back, but is still slithering downward. Or so saith she.

It's frigid, and the buds are browning. But spring will come, and then summer, and perhaps the old bones will finally warm to life. I look forward to June, when I'll be going with daughter Aloise to Solesmes, France, where my son Michael is a monk. Another son—my Spanish son, Johnny—will drive with wife and two young boys to meet us there, whereupon Michael will administer little Roberto and littler Kevin their first Holy Communion.

To PBB

Yes, Louis is all wrong giving Communion out indiscriminately [a reference to HK's novel, in which Fr. Louis had administered Communion to non-Catholics, to which PBB took (mild) exception] (but what was our President doing receiving in Africa?!). Yes, it's Christianity without the cross, excepting those prisoners who for one sin or another, theirs and mine, are on a cross. When I was last at Mass at St. Peter's in Rome, the priest came down the middle aisle passing hosts to outstretched hands; some turned and passed them to someone behind them, including one man who said: "Those are Mother Teresa's nuns over there. I sent that bitch \$200 and never got an acknowledgment." At which my Baptist friend turned and said, "You're a disgrace to your religion!" An anecdote with no bearing on the point at issue. We should not give the Eucharist to those who have no idea of the True Presence, but good people end up doing it by accident and even by intent.

To HK

Oh, yes, you are again absolutely right. My disgust at prisoners' crimes—the noxious ones like child molestation—goes the wrong direction and encompasses the sinner. Which only adds, Brent would say, to Christ's pain, for He bears my sin alongside that of the prisoner. When I get riled up, my objectivity, my very mind, dissolves. I have thought of prisoners paying for my sins. Thank you—that will help vastly in keeping my humility in place, by which I mean to the fore.

Your words on Communion are startling. The horror that brought that sacrament into being sometimes makes me tremble, tremble at the thought of what It is. And that incident you spoke of in St. Peter's maddens me. Hurrah for your Baptist friend! Then the thought strayed through my mind when I learned our prez [Clinton] had partaken in Africa—might this “save” him? Could that holy wafer produce a miracle, make an honest man of this appallingly amoral person? Well, it was a thought, comforting in a way.

God bless your sister for having the guts to live alone in her old age. Those of us, you and I, who are left behind have our small share of Purgatory, haven't we? But such goods attend it that I, at least, should be grateful. Yesterday was the anniversary of Brent's new life.

Am off to New York to join all my existing siblings in celebration of our widowed brother-in-law (confusing enough?), whom we love. We want to do this before the ranks thin again, which at our age could be momentarily. That's sad, isn't it? Well, when one of us dies, he will meet the three who have preceded, which compensates.

To PBB

The mystery of the Incarnation and the Eucharist would destroy us if we took them, I don't say seriously but to the fullness of their significance. The True Presence—in which I profoundly believe—what a way to do it! Entrust that power to sinful, weak, stupid, irrational man, who could run in and consecrate a bakery if he chose! God took an awful gamble.

Clinton received the body and blood, soul and divinity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ but I don't think he has the spiritual capacity left in his bones to begin to understand. But, who knows? I weep for him because he represents my political party and Georgetown University, which my son attended. The first graduate of the school to reach the presidency. Harvard has had seven or nine, all seemingly more moral men than Clinton. Yet—the sins of the flesh are less than the sins of the spirit. So we are left with leaving such judgments to the Lord.

But could the accident of the incident turn him around? We know that people have been put in the baths at Lourdes protesting and come out cured. Joris K. Huysmans tells of seeing a lame child emerge from the bath and run around the hospital all night, only to be crippled again in the morning. The mystery of Mary mixed up with the mystery of hysteria. We are all deep in mystery, which by a marvelous paradox makes sense of it all.

If I can find an extra copy of my *Sonnets to the Virgin Mary* I'll send them to you, published by a black student of mine, who became my Godchild on his conversion and soon left his wife and married another woman. Wouldn't it all be easier if the wires didn't keep

getting entangled? Yes, but probably a hell of a lot less interesting.

To HK

Again, again, you are absolutely right—mystery, by a marvelous paradox, makes sense of it all. I came across a wonderful passage the other day that touches this thought: All material things, the universe, our bodies, may be Eternal Thought expressed in time and space. The more the physicists and astronomers reduce matter, the more it becomes a mathematical formula, which is thought. When Eternal Thought expresses itself within the box of space and time, it becomes matter. Our thoughts, within the box, can only know material things first hand. But we can deduce that outside the box of space and time is Eternal Thought, which we can call God. Doesn't this deny nominalism and bring universals back to the throne of thinking?

I cling to my home more and more as the years go by. It is, I suppose, my security blanket. Or even more mundanely, I've gotten terribly set in my ways, which are not the ways of others. They were of Brent, but there, I mustn't brood. As you say, life is good, it's love, and there should be plenty left over to go around.

To PBB

A friend of mine had a Catholic woman friend who was married to a man of great sensibility who had been reared a Protestant but had long lapsed and was sympathetic to Catholicism, but unconvinced. He and she were very eager to buy a certain house, and the negotiations for the purchase seemed limitless and very complicated. So one night she asked him to drive her to the house and brought with her

a spade and a bundle. When she told him what she planned to do he was appalled. She said she was going to bury a statue of St. Joseph on the lawn, and the belief was that you would then get the house. It was important to bury the statue with the head pointing toward the house. He sat in the car shaking his head while she went about her task. Within two days, the realtor called to say everything was all set and the house was theirs, the negotiations having gone as they had reasonably hoped.

In delight that afternoon they drove over just to look at the house and admire it. There was the seller digging up the lawn. He had buried a statue of St. Joseph with the head pointing away from the house. I would like to say that the husband came into the Church. He may well have but faith remains a gift.

Now my son had a house which he had been trying to sell for two years. Tenants had wrecked it; he sought no redress, just eager to get out. I didn't bury a statue on the lawn but I did pray at length to St. Joseph, that neglected man, and the house was sold.

To PBB

Your letter came just as I was reading some essays by Teilhard de Chardin, who seems to me prophetic—the whole thing is building toward some Omega point which we can only guess at but live certain in the knowledge that it involves Christ. The book is *The Future of Man* and I bought it for a dollar in Salem while killing time before a dinner date and saw a bookstore going out of business. I also bought another copy of the *Jerusalem Bible* for one dollar.

Teilhard writes that evolution seems to have stopped when Thought came on the scene. So now, I guess, he

means that the evolution continues but in the realm of thought. Our thoughts are evolving as our knowledge about ourselves and our world continues to increase. My scientist friend, a devout man, maintains that the world, the cosmos, and everything in it is another form of revelation which we must pursue diligently, as Teilhard insists we are obliged to seek more and more knowledge about ourselves and the world. I've only read a few of his pages, and will continue. Brings us into deep waters, doesn't it?

To PBB

I promised to send you my *Sonnets to the Virgin Mary*, had trouble getting them out of the computer, can't find copies of the book. Am sure a couple should be reworked. Anyway, here's, I believe, the best of them. I'll work on the rest.

April

*When they drank morning joy from the
empty tomb,
thrilled and tortured and triumphant
and—
still skeptical, I presume (for reason
banned
a quick belief that light had emptied
doom),
you were at prayer, in union with the
Father,
informed with Flame, because you saw
your Son
limned in His new-found glory. Glory?
Rather,
something eternity had waited to see done
God the Father had not yet beheld
a body glorified, a body risen;
knowing such even Lucifer might have
kept his hand upon the unimpeachable,
impelled
to human love, known what it meant to
christen.
You saw Him first; you saw Him and
you wept.*

May

*The virtue-bright ferocity of flowers
shivers my heart. I am a man of mosses,
gray hours and lonesome paths; spider
embosses
the naked air to please me; sunlight sours*

*in golden surfeit; my macabre pleasures
hail bats in radar traffic; drink delight
in fogs and twilights; shaws bundle
treasures;
I have raised all my kingdoms in the night.*

*In all black byways, mother us, Lady of
Light,
trim wick, pellucid presence, reconciled
to all our human non-conformity.
Morning Star for creatures of the night,
for us, dull and deformed, an undefiled,
to our jagged shore, wash the salvific sea.*

To PBB

I am tardy in thanking you for the copy of Lucille Heslay's *Saints and Snapdragons*. I received it years ago when it first came out, either from her or from her publisher, because of the quotation in the front pages from an article of mine. Later she and her husband, Louis, came and spent a day or two with us on Cape Ann. That copy may be in the house but—where do you hide a book? In a library—I haven't seen it in years.

I can't tell you how much our correspondence has meant to me.

To HK

I've always been slightly apprehensive of Teilhard. I used to know some hard reasons for this, but that sort of thing never lasts in my head. What has lasted is fear of man's hubris, the sin of all sins, the origin of sin, which is evident in the superman boasts of latter years. We have thought, given us by

God, and it is leading us in scientific pursuits forward (or back?) to God. But is man's thought "better"—deeper, fuller, more perfect—than the thought of the early Fathers, Augustine, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Abelard, and on and on? It's just taken a different road, using implements created by God. To think this is man progressing, which is a scary thought to me too, gets all my guards up.

I am currently proofing for David Schindler, editor of *Communio* magazine, a book by Dorothy Day—a woman I, in my pride, sloughed off as a sort of communist, a Luddite, a dogooder. I'm entranced by her. Her thoughts on marital love are shining shafts that pierce right to the heart. And her love for Love! I shall see if I can get you a copy of the book when it is reprinted. In the meantime, here's a small story she includes in the book *On Pilgrimage*.

Fr. Roy, our dear Josephite friend, used to tell a story of a leper he met at a hospital up on the Gaspé peninsula. The leper complained to him, "How could he believe in the love of God?" Fr. Roy proceeded to tell his favorite story. "First of all, there is dirt, the humus from which all things spring, then the flower, which says to the dirt, 'How would you like to grow and wave in the breeze and praise God?' and the dirt says, 'Yes,' and that necessitates its losing its own self as dirt and becoming something else. Then the chicken comes along and says to the flower, 'How would you like to be a chicken and walk around like I do, and praise God?' and the flower assures the chicken that it would like it indeed. But then it has to cease being a flower. And the man comes to

the chicken and says, 'How would you like to be a man and praise God?' and of course the chicken would like it too, but it has to undergo a painful death to be assimilated to the man, in order to praise God." When Fr. Roy told this story he said with awe, "And the leper looked at me, and a light dawned in his eyes, and he clasped my hands and gasped, 'Father!' And then we both cried together."

Isn't that beautiful?

Have you tried to publish your most recent poetry?

To PBB

Here is a smattering of my poetry you asked for. This sort of thing keeps running through my head.

1. A Christian Sequence

No soft silk. He wore / the sour skins of wild beasts. / Yet he ate no meats. Only / insects and the sweet syrup / of the desert hives. / But, oh, the preaching! / We trembled even as he / washed us in the river. / An elder said, "His own / words will cut him down."

2. Advent

This is He then, / It, The Word, / barefoot / in Palestine? / Must we endure / such a banal / coming? / Look at me / crowned with / computing, / mastering cells, / all put to naught / by His / irrational / intransigence.

3. Good Friday

In that sudden darkness / I felt the ground / tremble under my feet. / A frightened voice cried, / "Something's hit the temple!" / I thought I saw / an ancestor rise up / from the ground / the flesh rotting / on his bones. / Terror mocked us / on all sides. / A zealot running / to the hill shouted, / "It's

all because / they crucified / the rabble rouser!"

4. Easter

Who would believe it? / Who could believe it? / If it wasn't for / the figure of fire / erect before / the tumbled stones / of the shattered tomb? / "He is risen!" / And the women fled / pellmell back / to where Peter / knelt in tears.

I'm delighted that you're delighted because I do like some of them very much, but before you ask your friend to publish them be sure he has the opinion of dispassionate critics.

We are both of us, you and I, wrapped or trapped in a World of Wonder that the world does not see.

To HK

Another lilting letter. It's nice to hear that I belong in the World of Wonder with you. Star dust and whirlwinds, fairy princes and goblins, and all the otherness that we wish it were has disappeared, and it leaves a sort of acedia, but not—in our cases—an empty heart. Your sonnets are at present in Spain. Do *not*, please, ask me to explain.

Summer, which I love, drags, which I don't love, with scanty work leaving a mind too free to roam. And part of me sinks into the lazy life all too easily.

I can almost pretend I'm back living on our 50-acre home, four miles from the nearest hamlet, in the foothills of the Rappahannock Mountains, surrounded by ten red-headed children and loved and protected by Brent. I tell you things I tell no one else.

Keep well, dear Herb. And let's live away the rest of our lives in our World of Wonder. It's full of clean

innocence and surely beloved by God.

To PBB

All your letters are filled with a spirit that I understand. I have never written to anyone so intimately as I have to you because, I sense, we share not merely the grief that comes with the loss of heart's dearest but more important we share those profundities which call to us beyond all else, that are so much our soul's aspirations and are so ineffable we hate to mention them, sometimes even to ourselves.

Having got that serious let me get sentimental. Here's a poem I wrote recently. You have only to change the title and the genders and I'm sure you will agree.

Teresa

*If I should die in my chair,
Across the table from me,
Know she was sitting there
Just as it used to be,
For our world is a wordless dream
And carries on when we die
Except with a subtler theme
And hello is the same as goodbye.
And when I am slumped in death,
With a gesture, as if it were planned,
She will rise light as a breath
And raise me up by the hand.*

To HK

I read and reread your letter and your poem, and they give me great peace. Things roil inside and the tears flow no matter my faith and resolution and wish to sacrifice with joy. And then I know I'm no different from all other bereaved ones. I haven't achieved the grace of loss as have you.

Last weekend, on one of those days that Washington gifts to those intrepid souls who brave its weather year round, I went to visit the graveyard, Brent's tombstone (of my design and of intri-

cate symbolism) having been erected the previous day. The graveyard is beautiful—small, tucked in the Northeast section of D.C., the oldest Catholic Church presiding, with weathered trees and tombstones in various degrees of decay, though not impossibly so. I went through the creaky gate, headed across the grass for the path, looked to my right—and at the end, in clear view, was Brent's (and my) tombstone. It is tallish, rounded on top, and on it is centered, in bronze, a cross. The figure is taken from an old medieval-looking cross I found in Salamanca years back, when such things still dominated Spanish life. Below, and on either side, are bronze angels—one inspired by the powerful angels that guard the entrance to Franco's memorial to the fallen soldiers of both sides in the Spanish Civil War (the Valle de los Caidos), its head held high and proud, hands outstretched on a sword; the other figure stands tall and straight but with bowed head, covered by a cowl, arms and hands at its sides; the first is the early Brent, a warrior Crusader for Christ, fighting with every inch of body and soul; the second is the latter Brent, the obedient servant and Carmelite, bowed by infirmity, humble in faith, and consumed by love. I walked closer, and the soft cool wind and warm sun added to the surge of joy I felt—for the first time this was *Brent's* place. Then I sat for a while, and lay down in the new-mown grass, and listened to the twittering insects and buzzing bees. I knew God had planned it that way. Later, my imagination running riot, I thought of that first glimpse I had at the end of the path. The path might have been the apse of a church, with cross on high and angels in adoration—and Brent the altar of sacrifice. No, I am not beatify-

ing him, though I have no doubt he's in heaven. But it rounds out a picture, and a life.

And so, "If I should die in my chair," he will "raise me up by the hand," and lead me to my resting place with him. The terrors of death are no longer, and I bless—as you once advised me to do—the living of life.

To PBB

I walked with you through the creaking gate into that ancient burying field, saw your stone, and you in your grief. I know your instincts are the same as my own, or close to it, so you will understand when I say that grief is a blessed thing, a benison and a balm, not too far removed from grace, the grace of God. We mourn and we grieve and we grow. I console myself with Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "Margaret." Do you know it? I'll write it anyway.

*Margaret are you grieving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leaves like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can
you? Ah, as the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie,
And yet you will weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sorrow's springs are the same,
Nor mouth had, no, nor mind expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed.
It is the blight man was born for.
It is Margaret you mourn for.*

To HK

I read your letter, and Hopkins' unutterably beautiful poem, and now my fingers clamp on the keyboard. And then I think of your indomitable sister and ponder coming changes in my own life, and know that age is a

closing in of horizons—perhaps the better to concentrate the mind and the soul on the coming incredible crash we face going into existence.

Increasingly, I find that Our Lady is, and lived, everything we are and live. She rejoiced, wept, worked, declared, obeyed—and in her case, won. And the awful dreary moments before her reward. Have you ever pondered what those years were like after the Resurrection? She was left to inspire the apostles, to carry on the work, which must have been a dragging time after the hours on Calvary. We widow/widowers, in a sense, go through the same drudge, and should accept it as we know she did. I was lately reminded of Bernanos' description of her, "younger than sin." And I realize she's still inspiring people.

One of my sons used to pluck my heartstrings by running to me when the clouds loomed dark and the wind whipped the trees and, looking up with shining blue eyes, saying, "O Mummy, tunder and lightening!" As a child I would on occasion run to the barn and climb to the hayloft, the better to relish the storm, God's playful wrath.

To PBB

We had a delightful visit from Bill yesterday. He was sailing with Van Galbraith and another chap, Chest, whose last name has escaped me, and put into Manchester harbor and tied up at the yacht club.

Bill seems in full force and tells me he has written still another novel, but not a Blackford Oakes. I called his attention to a recent issue of *The New York Review of Books* having in it a review by Garry Wills of a number of books on Catholicism in which he opens the review with an amusing story

from *Nearer, My God* about you and Bill baptizing house guests secretly. I love your brother, he's been such a good friend for so many years and it brightened my day to have such a surprise visit.

To HK

I was so happy to receive your letter, and for more than the usual glittering reasons. A day or two earlier, Bill had phoned and said, "Guess what?" with that wonderful lilting tease in his voice. "I saw *Herb!*" It was all there, the embrace of pleasure at being with you once again.

Isn't our Bill the loveliest person in the world? We grew up as close as siblings can be, sure of each other's love, unafraid of all the unfathomable unmanageable things around us that scare other children—but not us; we had each other. Did you ever as a child sleep in the attic, under a sloping dormer in your cozy covers? That's the way I felt with Bill around. And it continues. I can only repay by loving him with all I have inside me. Which gets into the subject of love, which I've been thinking about, which in turn—again—leads to suffering, which is fascinating in its mysterious way.

To HK

I went back to your letters and reread them. I'm excited by mystery, astonished at the eddies of thought that bereavement brings, and gripped by mourning Margaret, in a sense that Eve of us all—mourning not so much paradise lost as goodness betrayed. That puts your Teresa and my Brent—who have atoned, refund, and earned—at a remove from us, at a distance; but it will soon be spanned and then our oneness with them can join their one-

ness with God. And we will live happily ever after. Which is our wonder world reified and justified. The Irish know this intuitively.

Your Teresa died on January 19, which is Brent's birthday. It is now *their* birthday, her new one and Brent's old one. Another mystery, and such a pleasant one.

To PBB

I read all of your letters two or three or more times, and the most recent with your tribute to Bill was one of the most moving ever. What a lovely description of fraternal love. I shared it with my daughter Susan, who ran off to copy it to have it for herself. "It's the way I love my brother," she said, "but I could never say it so wonderfully." One of the great blessings in my life is that my three children love me and loved my Teresa above all else and love one another. I weep for families not granted such grace. Well, off with you to France and have a marvelous time, close to the heart of things.

To PBB

I'm sending you two poems I wrote for the Blessed Mother, to whom I have had a lifelong devotion and who has never left me in the dumps.

Small Song for Mary

my veins are blue / my lips are blue / my spirit's blue / for mary. / The sea is blue / the sky is blue / the sapphire's blue / for mary. / and I cannot go / the tomato / for being so / contrary.

They tell me that in the earliest paintings Mary was clad in red; the blue is modern. I call this next verse "Tangled Theology or a Reflection on

Some Consequences of the Immaculate Conception."

When Mary was a little girl / She threw her slippers at St. Anne / Which is the reason why today / Any child not seven can / Throw her slippers at her mother / And larger objects at her brother / (So I have been told) and not be in / Even the slightest venial sin.

I assume that the Blessed Mother has a sense of humor, otherwise I'm in big trouble.

To HK

Of course Our Lady has a sense of humor, which she handed down to Jesus, seen particularly, I think, in his handling of dear awkward enthusiastic St. Peter. Did He too throw his shoe—before age seven? I remember a prolonged discussion Brent, son Johnny, and I had years back when we were visiting Michael in Solesmes, over whether Our Lady ever suffered from a sickness—an ordinary cold, for instance. Being born without sin, would she have been susceptible to the ravages of Original Sin? As I recall, Brent said yes, Johnny and I disagreed—or the other way around? Anyway, your poem seems to answer that question.

To PBB

The republication of *Cape Ann/Cape America* [an early book by HK] has spurred a series of events that, added to my usual routine, has kept me wildly busy. Thanks though for what you say about *Literary Dublin* [a book by HK gifted to PBB]. When I spoke in Salem, instead of talking about *Cape Ann/Cape America* I gave a talk on Irish wit and humor. The reason is it's a theme on which I can go on all day, having a

memory full of Irish bulls, jokes, and anecdotes. It is so easy to make people laugh and it's good for them.

A chap walks into a pub in Ireland with a pig under his arm. The bartender says, "Where did you get him?" "I won him in a raffle," says the pig. That's not an Irish bull, just a poor joke.

Almost all my prayers these days are prayers of gratitude; for your letters among other things; and for laughter.

To HK

I've thought a great deal lately about Jesus and Brent, as individuals, of course, but also as one (heretical? presumptuous?). When I say good morning to one, I say good morning to the other. When I meditate after Communion, I speak to both of them.

Have you ever come across the book *He and I*, the words Our Lord spoke to the Frenchwoman Gabrielle Bossis during the first half of the century? Michael and I read a few passages every day. I bring it up because it is this book that has led to my conviction that He is inside each of us—something Brent insisted on and I couldn't accept. But if that is so, then Brent is also inside of me, and we're all part of each other—which leads me right back to where I started from. It's troubling and comforting and exceedingly hard to explain.

To HK

Brent and I would have been married 49 years on December 29. It was my parents' wedding day (they had ten children), and my oldest sister's wedding day (she had ten children), and finally ours (we had ten children). That's the sort of thing that, had it appeared in the Bible, would have had

the exegetes swimming in papyrus and ink.

Dear Herb, let us have a very very Merry Christmas, with Teresa and Brent in our hearts. And say this prayer: "Today I will do nothing but grow older and so draw nearer to the moment of eternal union with You. How wonderful to achieve so much by doing nothing."

To HK

My computer does the exact same thing from time to time. My remedy: get out of whatever you're in, turn the machine off, wait a bit, and then see if it's regained its good humor. It's my secret remedy for most things. And now some Celtic stories for *you*.

1. Three Irish fellows were walking along the road. One says, "It's mighty windy out here today!" "It's not Wednesday," replies the second. "It's Thursday." "Me too," says the third fellow. "Let's go on to the pub for a pint."

2. "An Irishman is never drunk so long as he can hold onto one blade of grass and not fall off the face of the earth."

3. "To be Irish is to know that the world will break your heart before you're forty."

My most exciting news is that Bill asked if I would like to go with him to Lourdes next year! I wrote return pigeon that I had packed my books, coffee, and peanut butter. Did I need anything more?

I feel warm and safe and comforted thinking of you.

To PBB

I'm afraid I bored you earlier with an account of the illnesses and deaths among my friends. The dead are buried

and the sick, save one, are recovering, but the whole episode, with Teresa's anniversary in the middle, didn't depress me—I am, thanks be to God, rarely if ever depressed—but it certainly put me into a sort of lethargy. Oh, I was happy about the house, frequently out to dinner with friends, but what marked it in my mind on reflection was that during that period I never touched the piano (I usually whack at it every day) and wrote on trifling things on my computer. I am slowly rising to the surface, and praying for one friend, seeking help down in Texas for recurrent cancer.

Meanwhile I have had America Online inserted in my computer and it is like the computer itself a fascination and an annoyance. But I am saying more to more friends via e-mail. I have yet to look at the Internet and shan't for a while. I have too much to read.

To HK

You speak of a lovely dinner with friends, some old, some new, and it reminded me of how God always fills our emptiness when He takes something or someone away. When in answer to a query by my sister Jane, who lives in the old homestead in Sharon, Conn., that I think of moving there, I enumerated all the loves and pulls that keep me here, among them a host of new friends, something I had hardly realized until then.

I hardly ever use the Internet. It hurts my back to lean over and manipulate the mouse, added to which is my invincible ignorance in respect to finding what I want to find. So I have given up, which saves not only my back, but what's left of my pride. There's some good in it after all.

And now I learn you play the pi-

ano! It was my first love—I majored in music in college—but I have not a smidgen of talent, which ruined a career before it was launched. I can't play by ear—the fundamental requisite, to my mind—and was trained vigorously in technique but hardly at all in reading music, essential if you haven't the ear. This left my memory, which was always bad and these days edges on the nonexistent. I feel, almost *know*, that you play by ear. And yes, I understand how the sadness, the lethargy, kept you from that consolation.

Stay well, dear Herb. Play the piano for you and for me. And we can love Our Lord together.

To PBB

I don't know how long you've been in your house but I think I know something of the woman you are and that means the house not only reflects you but is part of you. I am assuming that it holds a lot of happy memories, as mine does me. I could not think of leaving. I see Teresa's hand everywhere I turn.

Actually, I don't think I could live through the getting rid of the stuff that crowds my house, diminishing my library, disposing of the pictures, the statues, the junk that has accumulated here in more than half a century.

It is all very well to dismiss the material, but God put it here and we should love it and take care of it. I think of St. John Fisher, who died a martyr like St. Thomas More. Dressing in the Tower, he was donning a fur tippet when the attendant, knowing Fisher would soon be beheaded, said, "You won't be needing that for long." Fisher said, "The Lord gave me my health and I will take good care of it as long as I am permitted." Yes, I'll pray

you stay and are healthy and happy.

I want to die with my boots on, that is, with my house and junk about me. You cannot send me too many letters to make me groan. I leap to open every one.

To PBB

I think about your astrophysicist friend stricken with Parkinson's disease and my artist friend riddled with cancer and fighting for his life in Texas, and the whole problem of pain comes forward in my mind. Taking my morning walk I don't say the Rosary but I think about the various mysteries and how unbelievable the Christian story must seem to those without faith. Tertullian said, I am told, "I believe because it's absurd." The torments that Christ endured are inexplicable, unendurable, unbelievable, and yet I believe. The sufferings of all the world—our friends included—are related somehow to His sufferings. I must reread *The Problem of Pain* by C. S. Lewis, and then—the problem of pain in animals!

In response to your Irish jokes, Patrick was courting Mary for more than ten years and she was waiting, waiting, waiting for him to pop the question. They say the usual form in Ireland was to say, "Would you care to be buried with my people?" Close to despair Mary said one night as they went walking, "Pat, do you think we should be married?" He paused for a moment and said, "Ah, who'd have us?" Well, robins appeared this week and it won't be long before the warblers come through.

To HK

Could it be that the more you suffer, the deeper must be your love? Certainly, Christ's suffering—"unen-

urable, unbelievable"—is in a way explicable. His unendurable, unbelievable, and explicable suffering expressed his unbelievable and inexplicable love for us. And why suffering in the first place? That I'm sure has been covered by numerous brilliant minds. And though some balk, I think we all feel, deep down, that it is a necessary atonement, the washing away of sin so as to house the stainless one, to be part of purity. Yes, the folly of the Cross. And if we embrace it, we are God's fools. That's a nice place to be. But why animals? I don't know. It tears your heart, doesn't it? Even slaughtered babies are given Heaven as a reward. Animals too may have a Heaven, but somehow it's not the same.

To PBB

Your remarks on the relationship of love and suffering struck me as profound and on the mark, relating it to the "folly of the Cross." I welcome your animadversions on suffering because I have endured so little. My life, generally, seems to have been one of an ongoing serenity and I weep for some friends who are undergoing what I never had to, as are my children (their divorces and the pain attached to them). But then, reading an essay by George Steiner merely commenting on some aspects of the Holocaust carries man's inhumanity to man beyond any rational approach to such evil and, as you remark, throws us back on the cross of Christ—the blood shed at his circumcision would have been enough to redeem the world. But then He goes on to torture. I am with you on offering it all up, but I am frightened that I get off so easy.

To HK

I'm going back to France in May, for most of the month, but not to stay in Paris. I'll miss a return to the time of my sisters, but various hints didn't take root, so I'll go straight to Solesmes and stay there—with two grandchildren, for the first four days, which thrills me, and after they're gone socialize a bit with various friends I've made in the environs along the years, almost 20, I think.

And then those hours in which to ponder, and contemplate, and pray, and take joy in the ringing of the bells (the bells, bells, bells), and sink into the chant, and absorb the peace of holiness that's almost a smell. In between, I'll laugh with Michael, and laugh some more. It's cathartic. I'll come back, washed out, but washed out in a healthy way, never mind the jet lag and such. It's a shot of goodness that I need to get every year. And God is good enough to give it to me. So what else could I want? except my family and friends, which I also have, among them my dear Herb.

To PBB

I am putting together another book—an anthology—with a friend. It is to be called *An Irish Bedside Reader*. I conceived and started it five years ago. Dropped it. Did a *Boston Bedside Reader* (ignored by publishers) and have a publisher who in conversation said he would like to see the *Irish Bedside Reader*.

I had my three children out to dinner. Too rarely are we all together.

To PBB

Your mention of the friends you have made there reminded me of Bel-

loc's lines—I think I've got them close to correct [previously cited]: "Ours from the very first beginning / On to the undiscovered ends / Nothing is worth the wear of winning / Save the laughter and the love of friends." Yeats writes somewhere that "my glory was in my friends," which is a line I can say with happiness . . . my glory is in my friends.

To HK

The monastery at Solesmes has some little homes in which they place the families of the monks. When Brent and I visited Michael, we played house—making beds together, washing dishes together, buying groceries together. The day we left, which we always anticipated, as one always does the thought of going home, brought a common excitement and happiness—we would have to get the house ready, eat, pack, and catch our ride by five in the morning, all in the dark. It was fun, and we'd ride in the back seat of the car on the way to the airport holding hands.

On this trip, the first day at Pontmain (the house), I found Brent's cane—on our last visit we had forgotten it, and had giggled at our increasing senility (which was perfectly OK because we were both going through it). I brought the cane home with me.

And now, the best parts of life are the most piercingly lonely. But always the compensation. At our age it won't be that long before we're back to our full selves, you united to Teresa, me in oneness with Brent. I truly think that if I were told I had cancer, it might jolt me, but in short order I believe I would be rather joyful. Isn't it amazing to look forward to death?

God bless, dear friend and compan-

ion in grief and hope. You'll never know how much you've helped me these past years.

To PBB

I understand precisely what a good time you had and the anguish that you felt at Brent's absence. I miss Teresa throughout the day—taking my walk, watching television, reading, being with the children, washing the dishes. But at some moment of rather exquisite happiness, a very happy dinner with some brilliant conversation swirling around me, then, at such a moment, the anguish of her absence suddenly strikes me like a sword in my side. "Wouldn't she love to be here! And wouldn't I love having her." It doesn't spoil the evening, but the agony and the ecstasy (to borrow a title) move along together. And afterwards I return to just generally missing her. It's the great moments, so many of which she made, or helped make, that remind me of what wonderful years we had together. I suppose we could say that the beauty of the moment causes an equal intensity in the sense of loss.

To PBB

I carry your letters around and refer to them ever so often. Well, one of them anyway. O'Sheel's poem I take to be a metaphor for the Christian in the materialist world, a man who can call up or even abide the cruelty it takes to succeed here.

I know of *Triumph* only through you, and references to it here and there. I never saw a copy. [*Triumph* magazine (1966–1976) was founded by Brent Bozell.]

To HK

Have you ever really caught your

breath? I did when I read that you carry my letters around, especially the one (I haven't a clue which). I've felt quite shy at corresponding with you, knowing I am not on your level in any way. But your kindness—your gentlemanliness—kept me coming back despite my fear of boring you. I think perhaps our Teresa and Brent saw to that.

To PBB

One theory of poetry is that the closer it comes to music the better it is. Another theory is that all poetry should be heuristic, that is, that it should discover something new or point toward something that we know but can't define. The great Jewish philosopher Philo said that we instinctively know there is a God. That part is easy. But to define Him—that's something else again. We can't define love, we can't define justice, we can't define poetry. Nor can we define what poetry—if it is true poetry—is saying. Otherwise we would just say it.

I think of these lines and I haven't got them quite straight: "Oh warm west wind when wilt thou blow / that the warm rain down may rain / Christ, that my love were in my arms / And I in my bed again." And these by William Blake: "Sleep beauty tonight / Sleeping in the joys of night / Sleep, sleep in thy sleep / Little sorrows sit and weep." Why does our hair tingle at the roots when we read those lines and why do we weep? For all our lost Edens and the hope of Heaven.

To HK

Your words are open, as I feel poetry is—nothing set, only beauty ensuring a response in the pulse of the heart and the soul. It pulls upward—the pull of nostalgia that reaches out to the

beginning, to the source of the words and of us, to God. That I feel is what Blake is saying, and that is what you are saying, and they meld and join in a hymn of sorrow and of joy. When we finally meet Beauty, I think our hearts will be ready. Thanks for leading me.

To HK

The main work of the dual books is over, and I'm feeling the let-down—like seasickness, it's expected but nonetheless awful—a sort of emptiness. But that too will pass. All I need is some nice project and I'll be off again. The beauty of a writer, like you, is that you always have something on hand, in yourself, to pour yourself into. I am only a handmaiden, which means I must depend on another—I don't mind the posture in the slightest, but I do mind the voids.

I had a nice thought the other day while saying the Rosary and spotting a stained-glass window depicting the Annunciation. I think when the angel came down, Mary was kneeling in prayer, and the angel standing when he announced God's plan for her. When Mary said, "Fiat," she stood, and the angel immediately dropped to his knees. Now, if I could paint . . .

To PBB

What a sublime thought you had on the Annunciation. If the soul comes instantaneously with conception, yes, Gabriel would have fallen on his knees. Turn that into a poem, four lines or a sonnet. It is a most beautiful thought. The Rosary ends with her Queen of Heaven and all the angels kneeling.

Ten years or more ago I wrote a short story at the request of Dan Wakefield and it appeared in a magazine called *Ploughshares*, a literary quarterly. It

was so well received I decided to turn it into a novel [*Paddy Madigan*], which I did, and now at last it's coming out. On October 20 I am to give a reading and autograph books at a store in Beverly Farms, the next village to mine.

Never ask me to talk about myself. I can't stop.

To HK

You always give me cheer and hope, no matter how dreary the subject we mull over—although, as I think you agree, death isn't dreary, it's the leading up to it if we can't fight onto the end. All of which boils down to one thing. We must pray and pray, a spray of wisdom that comes with old age.

To PBB

The dog Cosmo has taken over our lives despite our unanimous disposition that we don't want a dog the size of Cosmo, who, my son contends, is not a real dog but a unique creature. Cosmo is a Pomeranian and P.G. Wodehouse writes of one that it looked like a mop miraculously endowed with feet and a tongue. I now have to get him out on his leash and tie him up twice a day. And then, of course, get him back in. Stooping is not one of the things I do best, and if not an ordeal it's a bit of a nuisance, except that he's so darn cute, dancing, as he does, with sheer delight if you simply speak to him.

Coming in from my walk today, having tied him up at the back porch, where his yapping will least annoy the neighbors, I bent down to unleash him, the hook and the ring on his collar lost in his brown and black luxuriant fur, and I thought why am I not writing to Trish, it's what I want

to do. And there you are.

To PBB

I enclose a poem which I recite to myself when I take my morning walk and half say the Rosary. I think the author was Joseph Campbell, an Irish poet.

*I see his blood upon the rose
And in the stars the glory of his eyes.
His body gleams amid eternal snows.
His tears fall from the skies.
I see his face in every flower.
The thunder and the singing of the birds
Are but his voice and carven by his
power.
Rocks are his written words.
All pathways by his feet are worn
His strong heart stirs the ever beating sea,
His crown of thorns is twined with every
thorn,
His cross is every tree.*

To PBB

Tomorrow is my 87th birthday and my friend Dr. Ransil is getting six or eight friends together at a local restaurant for dinner and some rousing conversation. Such things used to embarrass me, but now I let people treat me as an old man.

Well, I think it was St. Teresa of Avila who said, "Christ is risen. Nothing more to worry about." Whoever said it had it right.

To PBB

Your letters help keep me alive.

To PBB

My reading drifts from book to book, rarely finishing any one of them. I just did finish *A Celtic Childhood* by Bill Watkin, who now lives in Minnesota. Scatological and robust but basically a healthy story as opposed to *Angela's Ashes*.

I have your calendar before me and the word for Tuesday the 11th was "beadsman," defined as "one who devotes himself entirely to prayer; one who undertakes or professes to pray for another." The word for today is "fleshquake," defined as a "tremor of the body." Well, I'm closer to that than beadsman but I keep trying.

To HK

Our kindred spiritedness is zipping along. A few days before I received your letter, I began to get itchy at the silence. I wasn't really worried at first, just missing you—and then the thought came that you probably had the flu. I decided to invade your sick-room and write, and began by making out the envelope. Whereupon your letter arrived. You must be feeling better because your humor brightens every line.

I'm glad you haven't joined the chorus on *Angela's Ashes*. Don't know why, but I put it down after 50 or so pages. Yes, I do know why. I didn't like his way of speaking about the Church. I'm prickly on the subject; don't like family failings aired in public. Will keep my eye out for *A Celtic Childhood*.

To PBB

I've been reading here and there *The Vicar of Wakefield*, some Ariosto, a collection of humor chosen by the late P.G. Wodehouse, several anthologies of poetry, essays by William Winter, some Shakespeare, and some Isaac Asimov explicating the plays of Shakespeare, some Chaucer, and that's about it. Well, throw in some essays in the Allen Coren Omnibus, and Walter Starkie.

My son was commissioned to carve

a loon to be given ultimately to a woman for her New Hampshire summer home. He created a beautiful thing out of walnut. It surpasses any of the static decoys that you see here and there. It interests me as to why it seems so superior and (this being the feast of Aquinas; your calendar is before me) I resort to his idea of the qualities that should reside in a work of art (as explained by Maritain): integrity, harmony, and effulgence. The first two can come easily, I would guess, but the last is the secret of it all—it's catching up some touch of Being, or putting in a bit of one's own soul. And so one piece is distinguished from another, and, if one pays attention, one can feel it in one's bones. In any event, my son has done a lot of birds, stylized for the most part, but real enough at other times. But the loon is a new plateau.

To PBB

Since beauty like justice and truth is said to be another name for God, we are, of course, left at the threshold. Only the mystics move across the sill and we can go on talking our heads off and getting nowhere but, I hope, enlarging our spirit. Love is also a name for Him and I recite to myself often Chesterton's poem [previously cited]: "There is a place where lute and lyre are broken / Where scrolls are torn and on a wild wind go / Where tablets stand wiped naked for a token / Where laurels wither and the daisies grow. / Lo, I too join the brotherhood of silence / I am love's trappist and you ask in vain / For man through love's gate even as through death's gate / Goeth alone and comes not back again. / Yet, here I pause, look back across the threshold / Cry to my brethren though the world be old / Prophets and sages,

questioners and doubters / O world, old world, the best hath ne'er been told."

Weren't we both blessed that we understand that immediately?

To PBB

One of the pleasures of being a valetudinarian is to make the most of your troubles. I have in effect nothing to gripe about. I am in no pain. I can read. I can hear (not well). I take a spin at the piano, playing badly by ear. I play chess (my chess club has been coming to my home the last Wednesday of every month for thirty something years). I have a son living with me and a grandson, and a daughter who practically watches over me. In my best days I couldn't add or subtract so my other daughter does my income tax. My friends are solicitous. And so I thank God all day long. I think if I get up I can run 100 yards. That's the rub. When I get up, I have to be careful not to fall down. Everything seems to tire me. Except: typing into my computer. So what's my problem?

Lovely to have a friend one can write to such as you who understands. Thank you again.

To PBB

I was sitting on my front porch waiting for a friend to come and take me to her home for dinner and a game of Scrabble reciting poetry to myself when I found my speech was slurred. I immediately decided I was having a stroke when my friend came and I walked to her car, got in and told her almost immediately what I feared, and we drove to her house where she telephoned my doctor who said go to the hospital and had them prepared to receive me. A new experience! At

length it was ruled that I had had a ministroke. Nothing affected but my speech and a few facial muscles. But since then my eyesight has diminished. Can make the stairs one step at a time. I manage my version of the Rosary. One Hail Mary instead of ten. Our Father somewhere along the way, thank God for television. Some of it anyway. This letter took a lot of effort.

I sit on my front porch surrounded by beauty, nature's and my offspring's art work; keep praying for me. My heart bleeds for my country and for all who suffer and those without faith.

To HK

A real letter this time [PBB had been peppering HK with a variety of communications] to herald in not only the New Year, but tomorrow, which I know will be better for both of us than today. That's God's way, isn't it?

It's been a slightly harrowing time for me because for the first time in over a year I've been without work, and since I haven't a meditative bone in my body, I am mean, irritable, and horribly liable to fall asleep when I attempt to read. What this portends for the future is the scary part. But enough of that.

My friends, the admirers of your Dante, asked about you with such fervor that I picked up some of your old letters and began to reread them myself—and, no, I did *not* fall asleep, but marveled anew at their serene beauty and wisdom. (I seem to be writing in clichés today, but they fit, which is what made them clichés.) It made me feel very close to you, and to think of your Teresa and my Brent, who share a birthday, January 19, Teresa in Heaven, Brent into the

world. I find that thought so comforting.

Christmas was lovely. I recall my own youth, when we would carol away at home and then at times go out in the snow to the neighbors, who were scattered miles apart; it didn't really matter that we weren't very good; it meant a lot to them, I think, and much more to us.

It is New Year's Eve, and I plan to spend the evening watching taped shows, cuddled on the couch with my sixteen-year-old cat, happy to be still and warm, thinking of those no longer present, and times no longer here, and wondering when I will join them; I begin to feel left behind.

All love, from me to you, my dear dear Herb. We must hold each other's hands from afar. It's a nice feeling.

To HK

Did I wish you a Happy Valentine's Day? No, I didn't. It is hereby wished. And did I tell you I had been rereading our correspondence, mostly your letters?

To PBB

For the first time since Sept. 12 I am writing on my computer and I can't tell you how good it feels. "Gloria in excelsis." It's painfully slow but give me another day and I will write to tell you how helpful your letters and the affections expressed in them helped. I'm not going to use spell check. I'll just let you figure it out. P.S. For an editorial chore, would you read my book of poetry to see if you see a book in it? [a few indecipherable handwritten words]

To HK

I would be thrilled, and honored, to take a look at anything you might

want to send along to me. But I warn you, I know nothing at all about poetry—I didn't even read it (except the Tennyson sort, and then slightly and slightly) until recently. It was your *Suburban Man* [HK's 1965 book of poetry, gifted to PBB] that inspired me. Would you allow me to send it to Reid? He's the poet in the family, as I think you know, and he loves you dearly. But that, everything, seems vastly unimportant compared to receiving your first computerized letter since your stroke.

Loads of prayerful thoughts of thanksgiving for my dear Herb.

To PBB
(postcard, received on Good Friday)

I've put the wrong address in the last card. I hope this one gets to you. I've missed the disruption of our correspondence. But now that I'm up, my computer is down. "The devil is after you," my daughter tells me. This week we may [indecipherable] and I'm eager to write. I love your letters! I get another before you go to France.

It was on March 30, 2002, that a reporter from the *Boston Globe* had called to give me the news of the death of Herbert Kenny on Good Friday, and to ask for a comment. I wrote out a few sentences and called Trish Bozell.

I knew that she admired Herb Kenny but had no idea that they corresponded. In August of the year before I sailed my boat by Manchester, put in, and went to visit Herb. Over drinks, Trish's name came up. He said she was "a very special person." I agreed, and suggested I put in a telephone call and we could both chat with her.

He shook his head emphatically. "No," he said, giving no reason for his decision.

I did not know until Trish got the news of his death that she had never laid eyes on him, or spoken with him on the phone.

The letters said it all.

—WFB