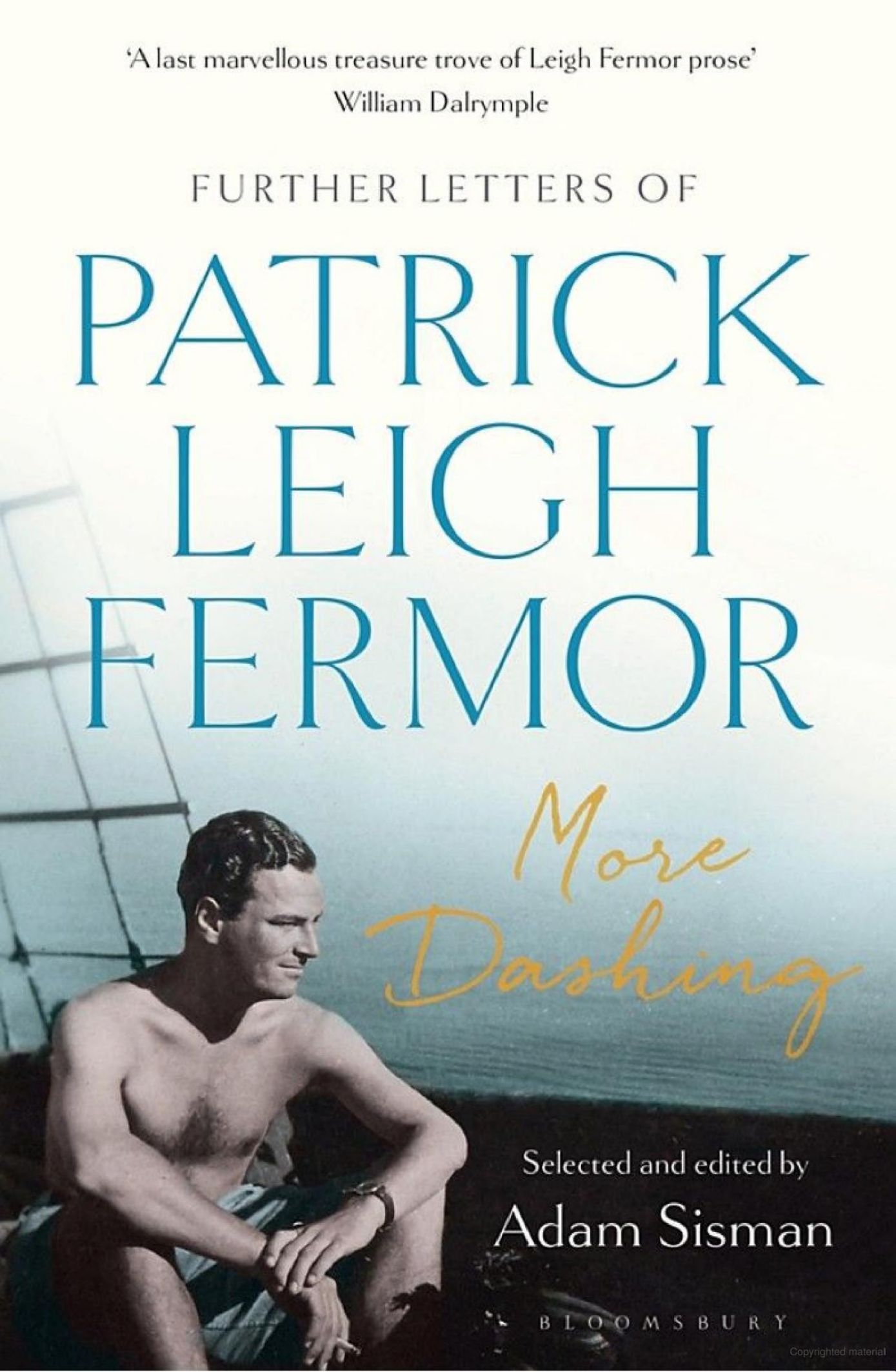
'A last marvellous treasure trove of Leigh Fermor prose'
William Dalrymple

FURTHER LETTERS OF

PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR



More Dashing

Selected and edited by
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BLOOMSBURY

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Introduction

This is a second selection from the letters of Patrick Leigh Fermor, a successor to *Dashing for the Post*, published in 2016. The title, like that of its predecessor, alludes to an expression often used by Paddy (as he called himself, and as almost everyone called him), 'dashing for the post'. His letters suggest that he is always writing in a rush. 'No more now, darling Diana, as I must pelt down the hill to the post,' ends one typical letter to Lady Diana Cooper. Many of his letters are headed 'In Tearing Haste' – so many, in fact, that he felt able to use the phrase as the title for a volume of his correspondence with his intimate friend 'Debo', Duchess of Devonshire. This hurry appears to have been motivated by a sense of duty, or even guilt; his letters are peppered with requests for forgiveness for not having written earlier. After heading one letter 'In Sackcloth and Ashes', he continued: 'The above should be the title of a published volume of my letters – if published one day in a hundred years' time – as <u>all</u> my letters start with abject apologies for lateness in answering …' In another he wrote that sackcloth and ashes were 'my letter-writing uniform'. (The publishers of this volume felt that 'In Sackcloth and Ashes' would be a misleading title for a collection of such exuberant letters.)

Yet if some of his letters were written at speed, most were written with care. They are full of wit and sparkle. Some of them are long, and must have taken hours to write – indeed, some of the letters themselves show that he wrote them over a period of several days.

Letters mattered to Paddy for a number of reasons, both practical and personal. One was that he moved around a lot. He travelled widely throughout his long life, so letters were a means of informing his friends where he was and where to find him. When he did settle, it was in what was then a remote corner of the Peloponnese, where friends from England were unlikely to call unless invited to stay. Letters provided a lifeline from this isolated spot.

Paddy was a very sociable person who was often alone. Friends were important to him, and he kept his friendships in good repair by correspondence. Yet it went further than this. For him, letters were a means of reaching out to those whose company he enjoyed, of making convivial connections across the void. Paddy seems to relish the contact with those to whom he is writing, even if it is only on paper. He is psychologically and often emotionally engaged with his correspondent. He writes to give pleasure to the recipient. His prose is lively, sometimes effervescent. The warmth of his personality rises from the page. At times one senses that

Paddy is writing to raise his own spirits, as if he knows that his imaginative construction of those of whom he is fond will bring him comfort and cheer.

Another reason why Paddy took so much trouble with his letters is his awareness that they might one day find their way into print. The letters themselves occasionally hint at this possibility – I have already mentioned one such hint, his suggestion that any volume of his letters, if published 'in a hundred years' time', should be entitled 'In Sackcloth and Ashes'.

Dashing for the Post received enthusiastic, even ecstatic, reviews. 'It goes without saying that nobody writes letters like this anymore, and it's a loss,' wrote Charles McGrath, reviewing the book in the *New York Times*. 'Here are descriptions and anecdotes equal to anything in his writing,' wrote Colin Thubron, himself one of the finest travel writers alive. John Julius Norwich likened Paddy to the great letter-writers of the past, among them Byron, Horace Walpole and Henry James.

When first asked to make a selection of Paddy's letters, I had little notion of what I would find. I did of course know that he and Debo Devonshire had maintained a delightful correspondence over more than half a century, which had been collected and published in 2008, skilfully edited by Charlotte Mosley. But I did not know then that those letters were matched by others – for example, his correspondence with Diana Cooper, from 1952 until her death in 1986. One could make an equally enjoyable book from their exchanges: arguably even more so, because Diana was a better writer than Debo. Paddy's letters to her were just as entertaining, and there were so many first-rate ones that I found it necessary to ration them in *Dashing for the Post*.

One reviewer of *Dashing for the Post* likened reading the letters to 'gobbling down a tray of exotically filled chocolates, with no horrible orange creams to put you off'. I crammed them in, resulting in a book significantly longer than my tolerant publisher had wanted, and even so I was obliged to leave out many tempting ones. As I wrote in the introduction, the 174 letters to thirty-seven correspondents included in *Dashing for the Post* were only the first gleanings from a hoard (scattered across six countries) containing at least ten times their number. In working on that book, I found an abundance of letters that seemed to me worthy of publication. Plenty of these I decided not to include – not because they were not good enough, but because it might have unbalanced the book to include too many letters to any one particular correspondent (such as Diana Cooper), or to have included too many written at one particular time or from one particular place. I decided too to adopt a policy (which I have continued here) of eliminating letters that to any significant extent duplicated the contents of those published elsewhere. As I was finalising my selection for *Dashing for the Post* I was already planning a second volume, so I was able to set aside a hundred or so of Paddy's best letters without too much of a pang. These form the core of this further selection. But it is refreshed by a significant quantity of letters

that have come to light only since the first volume was published. This new book contains 155 letters to almost sixty correspondents, more than half of whom went unrepresented in *Dashing for the Post*.

The letters in this volume span more than three score years and ten, from October 1938 to February 2010. The first, a flirtatious letter to a teenage girl, was written when Paddy himself was only twenty-three. The last was written when he was ninety-five, a widower, very deaf, his voice already hoarse from the throat cancer that would soon kill him. As the letter describes, he had recently fallen down a flight of stairs. Despite tunnel vision, which made it hard for him to read even his own hand, he continued to pen letters that are enjoyable to read – though hard to decipher. From first to last, his letters exude a zest that was characteristic. Often they are decorated with witty illustrations and enhanced by comic verse. Sometimes they contain riddles and cringe-causing puns. Paddy's delight in language is everywhere in these letters, expressed both in a serious concern to use words correctly, and in a playfulness, showing off what he can do.

By the time Paddy had reached adulthood, one of the two achievements for which he is best known was already behind him. At the age of eighteen he had set out to walk to Constantinople (as he called it), after a premature exit from his boarding school (which would honour him later in life as 'a free spirit'). The very last letter in this book recalls 'Nellie Lemar, the wonderful looking cause of my scholastic downfall'.

Paddy left England early in December 1933, and arrived at his destination just over twelve months later, on New Year's Eve 1934. In the course of this 'Great Trudge' across Europe, he slept under the stars and in schlosses, dossed down in hostels, awoke more than once with a hangover in the houses of strangers, sat round a campfire singing songs with shepherds, frolicked with peasant girls and played bicycle polo with his host. He observed customs and practices that dated back to the Middle Ages, many of which were about to vanish forever – swept away, first by the catastrophe of war and then by communism. As Paddy puts it in one of his letters, 'a sudden Dark Age descended that nobody was ready for'. He would give an account of his experiences in what became a trilogy of much admired books, which remained incomplete at his death: *A Time of Gifts* (1977), *Between the Woods and the Water* (1986), and the posthumously published *The Broken Road* (2013).

He would spend the late 1930s oscillating between Greece, Romania, France and England. In the late summer of 1938, before departing for Romania, he left with a friend in London two trunks, which were subsequently lost with their contents, among them notebooks he had kept on his walk and letters home to his mother. The loss helps to explain why very few of his pre-war letters have survived; though two have recently been discovered and are included here. Nor do more than a handful survive from the war itself. Rather than going into the Guards, which had rated his

capabilities as ‘below average’, Paddy had been snapped up by the Intelligence Corps, on the basis of the fact that he spoke German, Romanian and Greek; and after being evacuated first from mainland Greece and then from Crete as the Germans invaded, he had been infiltrated back onto Crete to operate under cover, liaising with the local resistance. It was during this period that Paddy planned and executed the abduction of General Kreipe, commander of the German occupying forces, a bold exploit that won him the DSO, and the other achievement for which he is best known. One letter in this book is written during this very operation, from a bitterly cold mountain hideaway in German-occupied Crete. It had started badly: Paddy had landed by parachute, but poor weather had prevented the rest of the team from making the jump, and after further unsuccessful attempts they eventually had to be infiltrated onto the island from the sea, more than a month later.

After the war Paddy worked for the British Council in Athens for just over a year – his only period of peacetime employment, as it would turn out, which ended in his dismissal. It became quickly apparent that he was ‘unfit for office work’. The rest of his long life was spent as a freelance writer. Before the war he was already pursuing literary projects, and had translated a novel from French into English; though he was unsuccessful in his attempts to persuade successive generations of the Murray family to publish it. (One letter in this volume, to the American bibliophile Heyward Cutting, discusses the particular difficulties of translation from French into English.) After leaving the British Council, he accepted an invitation to write the captions for a book of photographs of the Caribbean, a task that grew into a full-length book, *The Traveller’s Tree*, published in 1950. (Paddy would invariably exceed any word limit he was given, just as he could never keep to a deadline.) From then on, though his letters betray a gnawing anxiety about lack of money, he seems never to have considered any other form of work. His experiences in the Caribbean inspired him to write a novel (his only work of fiction), *The Violins of Saint-Jacques* (1953). He was already working on a book drawing on his travels in Greece, part autobiographical, part ethnographical, which grew into two volumes: *Mani* (1958) and *Roumeli* (1966).

One of the surprises of his letters is to find how much he was preoccupied with his writing. His habitual procrastination, and his apparent readiness to allow himself to be distracted by the smallest thing, suggest a dilettante. But the letters tell a different story, of a writer always trying to steal time to write, anxious at his lack of progress, guilty at his failure to fulfil his commitments, and perpetually trying to do better. This is the refrain of Paddy’s letters to his publisher, ‘Jock’ Murray, over a period of more than forty years. At Christmas 1984, for example, Paddy tells two friends that he has deferred a visit to London because he cannot face Jock while his book remains unfinished. Even after Jock’s death, when Paddy was in his eighties, he felt it necessary to apologise to Jock’s son for his presence in England by

marking his letter ‘NO SKULKING’.

One reason for his slow progress was that he was easily distracted. His friend George Seferis deplored his propensity for ‘Penelopising’, so that at night he seemed to undo what he had done in the day. (Seferis was qualified to make such a criticism, since he managed to combine a career as a diplomat with work of such a high standard that he would be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.) Paddy exhaustively rewrote and corrected what he had written, almost desperate to avoid errors. His torment at a mistake in *Between the Woods and the Water* is exhibited here in an agonised letter to his friend ‘Dadie’ Rylands.

At the beginning of his career Paddy had been encouraged to aim high, and he strove to produce the masterpiece that his admirers believed him capable of. Some thought that he achieved this in *A Time of Gifts*. Yet even the acclaim this book and its successor attracted was double-edged, because it called attention to the fact that the story was incomplete. There was public as well as private pressure on him to finish the trilogy; an article in *Le Monde* mocked him as ‘L’Escargot des Carpates’ (‘The Snail of the Carpathians’), a soubriquet that he ruefully accepted. The unfinished work hung around his neck to the end, weighing him down. Even in one of his last letters, written long since everyone else had given up hope of the third volume, Paddy reports that he was still ‘toiling away’.

Paddy’s domestic arrangements were unusually chaotic, even by the standards of a freelance writer. For one thing, he found it hard to resist the lure of society, and was capable of travelling across a continent for a party. (One of the earliest letters in this book mentions attending a party in Paris that had begun at one o’clock in the morning.) He seemed unable to concentrate on work in London, and sought out retreats in order to write free of distraction. He became adept at cadging houses from friends: Lady Diana Cooper’s house in Bognor, Niko Ghika’s mansion on Hydra, Barbara Warner’s cottage in Pembrokeshire, Sir Walter and Lady Smart’s manor house in the Eure. ‘Mr Sponge has fallen on his feet again!’ he writes in one of these letters. Being usually alone in such places, he wrote to his friends, often inviting them to stay (which somewhat defeated the object). After the war he formed a permanent bond with Joan Rayner, who became his lifelong partner, and, eventually, his wife; but they spent much of the time apart, even after they settled at Kardamyli, on the Mani peninsula. Paddy formed the habit of spending Christmas at Chatsworth, for example, while Joan, who did not share his appetite for company, preferred to remain alone, or with her beloved brother Graham. This of course meant that they often had reason to write to each other. Paddy called himself ‘Mole’ and Joan ‘Mite’ or ‘Muskin’. His letters to Joan reveal an aspect of his character that he normally kept hidden: his slides into gloom and depression. He depended on her, not only for encouragement and emotional support, but for practical and indeed financial assistance. Joan was unquestionably the most

important woman in his life. After her death in 2003, he was bereft. 'I constantly find myself saying "I must write – or tell – that to Joan", then suddenly remember that one can't, and nothing seems to have any point,' he wrote in reply to a letter of condolence.

But before Joan, there was 'Balasha', whom he had met in Athens in the spring of 1935. Though sixteen years older than him, she was still in her prime, and they fell in love – or, as Paddy might have put it, became 'terrific pals'. They were together almost five years, until separated by the coming of war: after 1939, they would not see each other again for more than a quarter of a century. By the time they were able to renew contact, Paddy was in love with Joan. Yet Balasha Cantacuzène had been his first love, and seems to have retained a special place in his heart. Balasha's life after the war was hard. As 'elements of putrid background', she and her family were vulnerable to persecution by the new communist regime. She tried to escape from Romania with her cousin Alexander Mourouzi, but was detained and sent back, and soon afterwards she and her sister were brutally evicted from their ancestral home. None of Paddy's letters to her at this time have survived, but a letter written to Mourouzi in 1948 expresses sympathy for the hardships they are enduring and his hopes that they may be allowed to come to the West. In 1965 Paddy was able to travel to Romania, and visited Balasha and her sister after dark, because it was dangerous for Romanians to be seen to consort with anyone from the West. Paddy, himself still youthful and vigorous at fifty, was shocked by Balasha's appearance: she was now an old woman, losing her teeth and her hair, the wreck of her former self. His subsequent letters to her are written with gallantry and tenderness: one has the sense that he is trying to include her in his life, even at long distance.

Joan recognised the sentimental importance of Balasha to Paddy, and wrote to her affectionately, as if to a member of the family. She also tolerated Paddy's lovers ('terrific pals'), and even his casual encounters with prostitutes, confident that he would never leave her. His love letters to his younger girlfriends are quite frisky – particularly his letters to Ricki Huston, the much younger Italian-American (fourth) wife of the film director John Huston.

As well as such love affairs, Paddy maintained several close and long-term friendships with women, conducted largely by letter. Though platonic, there was an element of courtly love in them; it is significant that his lady pen pals were all well born – among them Lady Diana Cooper (twenty-three years his senior) and Ann Fleming, both of whom he always addressed as 'darling'. In 1980 Paddy dug out his letters from Diana Cooper and re-read them, a correspondence that by that time had lasted almost three decades. He was very moved, he told her, 'by this record of shared delights and trust, confidence, warmth and loving friendship, and can't believe my luck, unfaltering for all these years, and still prospering in such a marvellous,

happy and treasured bond, light as garlands, as lasting as those hoops of Polonius'. Another long-term correspondence was with Debo Devonshire, youngest of the lively Mitford sisters, five years his junior. Some believed that Paddy and Debo had once had an affair, but those who knew them best doubted this. To give a flavour of their epistolary relationship I have included in this volume a couple of his early letters to Debo from *In Tearing Haste*, as well as two late letters, previously unpublished.

In the late 1940s, when writing *The Traveller's Tree*, Paddy sought sanctuary in a succession of monasteries in northern France, an experience which itself would provide a subject for a short book, *A Time to Keep Silence* (1957). From these he wrote a series of letters that give a vivid picture of monastic life. Writing the letters, and observing how the monks lived, prompted him into reflections on spiritual questions, unusual subjects for him, at least in correspondence. He would return to his favourite monastery, Saint-Wandrille, several times over the next decade. Another, more temporary refuge was the 'stupendous' castle of Passerano, inland from Rome (from its battlements the dome of Saint Peter's was just discernible on the horizon), which he took for the summer of 1959. Paddy had sewn 'a vast heraldic banner, several yards square', to adorn one wall at the end of a large banqueting hall. He was tempted to fly it from the highest tower, as he admitted in a letter to Jock Murray: 'Then, when the Black Castellan of Passerano displays his gonfalon from the battlements, the peasants of the valley can hide their cattle and douse their lights and bolt up their dear ones!' To balance this attack of *folie de grandeur*, he explained that the living conditions were primitive, since the castle had not been inhabited for over five hundred years. 'There is no sanitation at all. It's all fieldwork under the trees, and the only lighting is by oil-lamp.'

Yet another refuge was Easton Court at Chagford, a hotel on the edge of Dartmoor run by an unconventional American woman and her English beau. Easton Court had been discovered by Evelyn Waugh, who wrote several of his books there; other writers had followed, including Paddy's friends John Betjeman and Patrick Kinross. From the late 1940s until the early 1960s Paddy stayed often at 'Chaggers', from which he wrote several of the letters included here. He went there to write; though another attraction of the hotel was that it offered the possibility of riding to hounds over the moor with the local hunt three times a week. Here and elsewhere, are lyrical descriptions of nature – striding out in the fields, picking his way along mountain paths, driving into the sunset.

As all this suggests, Paddy rarely stayed in one place long. In fact, he did not have a permanent home until he was almost fifty, in 1964, when he and Joan bought a piece of land overlooking the sea in the Mani, beneath the towering Taygetus mountains near the village of Kardamyli, and began building a house. Letters included here describe the search for a site, negotiations to purchase the land, and plans for the house itself and the

surrounding garden. For the first few summers at Kardamyli, Paddy and Joan bivouacked in tents as the land was cleared and the house was built. Paddy took a keen interest in every detail of the design and construction, a further distraction from his writing, as he complains in a long letter to Joan. Work on the house would not be complete until the end of the decade.

Some of their friends came to visit, bringing with them a whiff of the wider world to this remote region. But much of the time Paddy and Joan were alone at Kardamyli, with just each other and their cats for company, enjoying simple pleasures such as swimming and reading. One letter tells of walking in the mountains and being followed by goats, trying one device after another to shake them off.

These letters provide accounts of Paddy's travels in Turkey and Tibet; Jordan and Syria; India and Sri Lanka; France, Italy, Spain and Portugal; Scotland and Ireland; Hungary and Romania; Central and South America, and the eastern seaboard of the United States. The incongruity of a film crew, headed by the maverick director John Huston, and a starry cast that included Trevor Howard, Juliette Gréco and Errol Flynn, on location in 'darkest Africa' is explored in two letters from a former French colonial territory, now Cameroon. Paddy was there in his temporary capacity as screenwriter, since he had adapted the novel for the screen. Another letter relates the shooting of *Ill Met by Moonlight*, the film based on the story of General Kreipe's abduction. On location in the French Alps, Paddy met a screen version of himself. 'Dirk Bogarde turned out to be absolutely charming … everything that the most confirmed snob could pray for,' he wrote to Joan.

It would be foolish to deny that Paddy had a romantic interest in aristocracy, and all its paraphernalia: genealogy, heraldry and the rest. Yet if this was snobbery, it was of a comparatively innocuous kind. There was nothing oleaginous in Paddy's relations with his betters (except perhaps, in his attitude to Her Majesty the Queen). Nor was there any superciliousness towards the 'lower classes'. Paddy was at ease in any company; he could walk into a simple taverna and soon have everyone singing. His letters contain glimpses of the great and the good: a chance conversation with the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, when Paddy opens the wrong door, or a glass of ouzo under the pine trees with Harold Macmillan. They describe encounters with such varied figures as Jackie Onassis, Camilla Parker Bowles, Oswald Mosley and Peter Mandelson. But Paddy also relates his adventures with the humble: a 'picknick' with the stonemasons at Kardamyli, or a drunken feast in the Cretan mountains with his old comrades from the resistance, most of them simple shepherds and goatherds.

'He was the most English person I ever met,' recalled Agnes 'Magouche' Fielding, second wife of Paddy's close comrade, Xan: 'Everything was *ripping*, and there was more talk of P. G. Wodehouse than of Horace or Gibbon.' Indeed, Paddy himself was something of a Wodehouse hero, in his

boyish manner, his innocence, his gentleness, his sense of fun, and his tendency to get into scrapes. (One letter included in this volume tells of a high-spirited brawl, alcohol-fuelled, in County Kildare, which Paddy had provoked.) His letters are dotted with amusing and usually affectionate anecdotes about the eccentrics he has known.

There is an absence of malice in his writing, and a related unwillingness to offend. Several of his letters express anxiety that casual comments made in private correspondence may wound if broadcast. Towards the end of his life he began to edit those of his own letters in his possession, censoring passages that might cause upset, and adding the occasional explanatory note for his biographer, Artemis Cooper. Both he and Joan were distressed to read two vicious poems about Paddy written by Maurice Bowra, who had been their guest on several occasions, and whom they considered a good friend. 'I like[d] Maurice very much, which makes the whole thing even gloomier,' Paddy wrote in a letter included here. He asked for the poems about himself to be suppressed, as well as his own disobliging anagram for Bowra, 'Eroica Rawbum'.

Paddy was a philhellene, an Englishman who went to live in Greece, as Byron had done. Indeed, there was more than a little of Byron about him. Like Byron, he chose to swim the Hellespont, the treacherous strait between Europe and Asia. Byron claimed this swim as 'my greatest achievement', though he had been twenty-two when he undertook it; Paddy was sixty-nine.

In Athens after the war Paddy formed close and enduring friendships with Greek artists and intellectuals, especially the poet George Seferis, the painter Niko Ghika and the 'Colossus' of letters, George Katsimbalis; but in the mid-1950s some of these became strained by the Cyprus Emergency. This was 'an argument among friends': two nations, Britain and Greece, which had enjoyed a long history as allies. It was understandable that Greeks should feel a claim on British sympathies, since only a decade earlier, in 1940–1, they had been the only other people fighting Axis troops on the continent of Europe. Paddy felt a conflict of loyalties, between the country of his birth and the country he would make his home. The enmity was such that he felt obliged to quit Greece for a while.

In general, Paddy was not a political person. An instinctive, old-fashioned conservative, he took little interest in politics except when it touched him in some way. In a letter to Jessica Mitford (the communist sister) in 1983, he tells her that he has enjoyed her piece on Mrs Thatcher's England 'not so much for the sentiments – I rather fear that in terms of hands and bell I wring when you ring, and vice versa: too late for this old ocelot to do anything about his spots, I fear – but for the splendid jokes'. As a young man travelling through Germany in the mid-1930s he had disliked the Nazis he encountered because of their crudeness and their anti-Semitism, but he was indifferent to their rhetoric. In 1967 he reacted cautiously to the military takeover in Greece, the so-called 'Colonels' coup'. In a letter to Joan, who

was in England at the time, he suggests that she may know more about what is happening than he does. ‘All my spontaneous sympathies (in spite of my official views generally) are against the coup,’ he wrote, ‘largely because those in the provinces who welcome it are … the people one likes least in Greece.’ In another letter to Jock Murray, cautiously worded to evade the scrutiny of the censor, he appeals for help to free the Greek publisher of *Mani*, who ‘has been roped into durance for some unstated reason, where she still vilely is’. During the regime of the ‘Colonels’ he became friendly with Tzannis Tzannetakis, then in political exile, and a prominent politician (briefly prime minister) once democracy had been restored.

Paddy’s magpie mind is evident in his letters. Before setting out on his ‘Great Trudge’ he had packed *The Oxford Book of English Verse* in his rucksack, and on the walk had committed much to memory, so that he could recite great chunks of poetry, more or less accurately, at will. He would continue to read widely throughout his life, and was able to retain much: repeatedly topping up a cornucopia of knowledge that overflowed into his correspondence. In a letter to Diana Cooper, Paddy points to ‘the enormous amount of buried quotation’ in Raymond Asquith’s letters to his wife, ‘which must mean a vast quantity of shared poetry which was in daily use, and pointless if the other correspondent couldn’t spot it’. There is an enormous amount of buried quotation in Paddy’s letters too, and one suspects that a significant proportion of this went unrecognised by their recipients. I daresay that some of it has gone unrecognised by the editor.

The letters themselves tell us something of the circumstances in which they were written. ‘I’m scribbling this in a glassed in loggia overlooking a dilapidated Tuscan farmyard and trellis,’ one letter explains; another that he is sitting in the garden of the British Embassy in Athens, with the head of an enormous Labrador on his lap. ‘The sun set some time ago, I’m writing outside the studio, and it’s getting darker and darker, bats wheel about among the cypresses, the sea is a fading zinc and lilac hue, and I bet this is getting less and less legible,’ he writes to Jock Murray. In a letter to Harold Acton, he apologises for the smudged ink. ‘I had put a glass of whisky and soda on my desk (during a thunderstorm), then all the lights went out, as they are prone to here. Fumbling for matches, I knocked the glass over, hence the frightful mess.’

Once Paddy was settled at Kardamyli, he seems to have developed a routine of rising early to work (with a half-hour swim at seven, so that he could lie on his back in the water and watch the sun come up over the Taygetus mountains), writing letters in the afternoon; often they refer to the need to curtail before the post departs. On several occasions he opens a sealed letter to add a postscript. Then he might begin work again. ‘I have several times – the first time in ages – got into that wonderful, oblivious and timeless trance where meals flash by like brief irrelevances – eleven o’clock last night before I thought of dinner (just in time) and then far on into the

night,' he writes in a letter to Joan.

Almost all of Paddy's letters were written by hand, though a handful were then corrected and typed. Some of them – particularly those he wrote towards the end of his long life – are difficult to decipher. 'Please tell me truthfully: could you read this letter or was it impossible work?' he asked, as a postscript to one of his last letters to Debo Devonshire. In editing his letters, I have occasionally found it impossible, and have been obliged to resort to guesswork, deciding on the balance of probabilities which word is meant.

As I have already mentioned, some of Paddy's letters are very long, ten tightly written pages or more. A rough estimate suggests that he wrote between 5,000 and 10,000 letters in his adult lifetime. That is an average of several letters a week – and of course, there would have been many weeks when he could not have written any, so the rest of the time he must have been writing more. When one reflects on this, what is most striking is the sheer amount of time and effort Paddy devoted to writing letters. Since many of them record his unhappiness at failing to fulfil his promises to his publisher (not to mention his bank manager), one is forced to conclude that writing letters took up time he could have spent writing books. But was this such a bad thing? Of course, it was regrettable that he never completed his trilogy, and perhaps sadder still that the evening of his life was darkened by anxiety about the unfinished work.

Yet we may take a different view. The letters may sometimes be penned in haste (or even 'in tearing haste'), but they are written in a spontaneous, free-flowing prose that is easier and more entertaining to read than the baroque style of his books, which at times can seem overworked. I would argue that Paddy's correspondence is part of his oeuvre, worthy to take its place alongside the work that he published in his lifetime. Now that we can read his letters at length, we can judge their worth. At their best, they are as good as any in the English language. They are utterly distinctive: Paddy's sunny nature shines through them. His letters are exhilarating; to borrow an expression he liked to use, they are absolutely 'tip-top'.

Editorial Note

Readers should be aware that Paddy's letters are not necessarily reproduced in full here: I have chosen to omit the more mundane passages which often refer to practical arrangements, or points of obscure detail of little general interest. Excisions are indicated by ellipses. I have taken it upon myself to omit repeated words and phrases and to correct the occasional spelling error, particularly in the use of foreign words and names (though I decided to retain Paddy's delightful spelling of 'picknick'). I was tempted to retain Paddy's spelling of 'Teusday', which makes aural sense, but looks so odd that I decided against. I have also standardised Paddy's somewhat erratic punctuation. As he himself would frequently lament, his handwriting is notoriously difficult to decipher, so I have sometimes been obliged to resort to guesswork, and no doubt my guesses have been wrong on occasion. In the handful of instances where I have been completely stumped, I have written 'illegible' in square brackets. I have used the same device for simple translations or other brief expository material, to avoid unnecessary annotation. Words and phrases such as book titles that Paddy underlined are usually presented in italics, to conform to standard publishers' practice. Short profiles of the people mentioned most often in the letters, including most of the addressees, are provided in an alphabetical dramatis personae at the end of the book.

THE LETTERS

In 1935, soon after completing his great walk across Europe, Paddy met 'Balasha' (Marie-Blanche) Cantacuzène at a party in Athens. She was a Romanian princess, from one of the great families of Eastern Europe; her ancestors had governed Moldavia and Wallachia for centuries. Though he was only twenty years old when they met and she was sixteen years his senior, they fell in love, and would remain together until the outbreak of war in September 1939. Much of this time was spent at Balasha's family home, Băleni, in Romanian Moldavia.

This letter and the one that follows were written from Băleni to Bridget ('Biddy') Branch, the younger sister of their friend Guy Branch; Paddy and Balasha had stayed with the Branch family at their house in Pembroke Square when they arrived in London in January 1937. In August the following year, Biddy, then still in her teens, had gone out to Romania for a six-week stay at Băleni; this letter was written after her return to England.

To 'Biddy' Branch — Băleni
October 1938 — Romania

Dear Bids,

I'm disconsolate about your vicissitudes and reverses in love. Tom's[1] symbolical departure for the wide open spaces, Pat's absence in Switzerland, and Toivo's silence, altogether, are overwhelming. I think it is the right moment for me, your only faithful cavalier, to break silence and tell you that all is not lost. In fact, Biddy, it must be fun to be fancy-free, to be able to let your mind wander without any inner voice to forbid it: ready to start something. Anyway, the hecatomb of bleeding hearts that you left behind in Bucharest ought to have glutted you for a year. There are at least a dozen fancy men there who need no encouragement, and this flickering and wide-spread forest-fire abroad must surely console you for the winter's chill at home! It is like a fiery belt of beacons embracing all Europe from Finland – almost the North Pole – skirting the Black Sea all the way to south of Greece, in the warm bosom of the Mediterranean; and I don't know how many bonfires are smoking beside your homeward path. So what the hell.

This letter has begun a bit too 'man-of-letters'-ish, but that last phrase puts it right. It's all true, though. Nicky Chrissoveloni,[1] Paul Zanesco Alcover,[2] Ivan Ghyka[3] and all the others are yours forever. So don't you stand any nonsense at home.

Everyone misses you terribly here, and your letters are devoured from beginning to end by each of us in turn. No detail is missed – not even the Yiddish paper for Leich Ferman.[4] None of us have quite got used to your absence yet, looking on you as a fixture that is temporarily and irritatingly detained elsewhere. Tea-time is just over, and your letter and packet was brought by Mustapha [one of the staff at Băleni] just as Balasha was saying 'I do hope Biddy's reply hasn't got lost. She must have written,' and we were nodding our heads in silence. You would love the wintry nursery-teas that have started now, with golden piles of *cozonac*,[5] honey, toast, and salt to put on one's butter, and hot tea just right out of a huge brass samovar that steams and gurgles on a table by itself, and distorts the reflected lamplight in its huge brazen surface. The stove is piled full of logs, and everything is so kind and warm and *cardouble* [comfortable?]. Constantine[6] had just come in from shooting, with four hares already stiff under their soft fur. Balasha and Pomme[7] had been talking and playing with old papers and drawings, and their disorder swamped one lamplit corner. Ina[8] had appeared from her room and her writing, and I'd just come in from a ride that ended long after dark. Tea, and your letter, are finished now, and I have retreated to the library. A terrific wind has sprung up, knocking the branches together outside, and slamming and rattling all the doors and windows in the house.

Last week Pomme, Boule[1] and I went to Galatz[2] for the day, buying curtains for Balasha's room. They are lovely and blue ones in soft colours with a pattern of Persian flowers, like something out of Jane Austen. And, very exciting, we've put the old baldaquin on top of Balasha's blue bed, turning it into a huge blue four-poster with canopy, valences, and richly folded curtains all round. We all of us got silk for sumptuous dressing-gowns – mine is a bit too sumptuous I think; a trifle womanly, but gorgeous. We had a long luncheon [of] crayfish and other crustaceans, and Dimitri was sad to know that the pretty English *coniţa* [young lady] really had left.

Everybody has left now – Gladys[3] a week ago, and the platoons of officers and generals (but no king, it's all right Bids) who swarmed in the Maison d'Amis for the [manoeuvres]. Prue[4] doesn't seem to be coming, alas, and there are no Dereks or Anne-Maries[5] on the horizon, mercifully. Winter is closing in, and the fiercer it grows outside, the more the house comes to life, like a long strong-timbered ship on a cold sea, with all its port-holes alight, with warmth and comfort inside. We have got ourselves made warm flannel Russian shirts for the winter, wine-red, canary red, and dark blue, worn belted about the middle. A cunning man in the village is busy on our sheepskin coats.

Doina[6] is now quite mended and has forgotten all about our mournful little trio in the drizzling twilight beyond the vineyard. Pani[1] is delighted at the approach of winter, it reminds him of Poland, and he has never been able to understand the summer. I found him putting hay into Cimpoi's manger the other evening, puffing in the dark stable, and we went into the old coach

house and looked at the carriages – the pretty open one with the hood and the lamps that took us to Gara Maria [a railway station], and a magnificent shiny black one, closed in, and upholstered in buttoned leather inside. We climbed in and sat on the soft seat, and smoked a cigarette. Pani told me how he used to drive Balasha's grandfather into Galatz in it 'in the time of the Knéaz'.[2] The Knéaz used to sit inside covered in furs, with a brazier on the floor to keep his feet warm, Pani, equally fur-covered on the box, with six magnificently matched horses in front. 'Motor cars? Peuh! The only thing one notices is their stink. When we bowled down the Strada Domnească [Lord's Street] in Galatz, all six horses lifting their feet together, and me up top cracking my long whip, the policemen held up all the traffic to let us by, and everybody looked round and admired us. *Das war etwas!*' [That was something!] Pani doubled up then his hands on his knees, wheezing with sudden laughter, '*Das war etwas! … Aber jetzt …!*' [That was really something! … But now it's not the same!]

I went for a long ride this afternoon (I write to you booted and Russian-shirted, smelling of saddle polish and horse sweat. This is to put you in the mood.) I had an exciting gallop on Drâmbă in the big field where we always galloped, beside the avenue. Drâmbă jumped and writhed like a dolphin at first and then pelted along at a terrific rate, showering clods of earth and mud behind him and on me, like a dark comet. I wish you had been there on Doina or Cimpoi, and we'd have gone along, neck and neck, with stirrups almost touching, like the wind. I miss you very much on my lonely rides. You'd love the colder weather and the soft sad feeling of the fields, and the bloody and ragged sunset over those rolling hills where we went with Pomme the day it rained. Today it was magnificent, the sky torn and bleeding on the skyline with a soft grey mackerel-sky up above, like cloudy sand-dunes, or flocks of sheep, or angel-wings crossed in a regular design. The trunks of the avenue leading to the vine looked quite black, and the trees were shedding their golden and russet leaves on the damp earth all along. I saw Iou[1] and the children at the vine coming out to the lighted house like little troglodytes. Then out onto the plateau beyond the fatal ditch, down in to the valley on the left, and up into the forest beyond – now all red and gold – where we went that time I was on Moș, [Uncle] Mihai's horse, then back by that deep valley where the well is, up the other side through the dead maize stalks, and home along the little path where we heard the crickets singing in the hollow. There are no crickets now, but I met a little shepherd whistling to himself surrounded by his moving flocks bleating (baa! baa!) and tinkling their little bells in the dark. By the time I got home, [there] was a misty crescent sailing through the watery mackerel-shoals up above, and a creeping wind. Constantine's bright headlights came peering down the village street, back from shooting, making Drâmbă shine all over. We came in from the stables together, Constantine laying his gun lovingly on the billiard table.

I got a big parcel of books from Hatchards the other day, containing Gibbon's *Decline & Fall*, & the *Oxford Book of English Verse*. It made me think of the lights of Piccadilly through the rain on an autumn evening, with a wind roaring across the park, and me peering at the books in the bow-window of Hatchards. Please write long, long letters, like this one, just as juicy and full of description and heartburnings! I'm sure all will turn out for the best with your fancy-men, and can't feel at all anxious on that score! Please give all my love to Mayme[2] – I think of her so often, and of our happy family in Pembroke Square, and I am going to WRITE: and to Guy.

God bless, Bids, and good hunting for the winter; you being the quarry and everyone else in full cry being understood.

Lots of love
Paddy

P.S. 'He that keepeth his mouth, keepeth his life; but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction,' *Proverbs* XIII, 3.

P.P.S. (Shove over, Biddy …)[1]

To 'Biddy' Branch — 6 Shepherd Market
undated [September/October 1939] — W1

Darling Bids,

Just heard 2 days ago from Guy and Prue [Branch], and then Mayme, of your engagement to Tom, and write as quick as I can to wish you every kind of happiness in your Married Life for you and the very lucky Tom. To be quite truthful, I can't help feeling a faint pang of jealousy, not in a direct way, but because it is one of the Sex's Fairest Ornaments being whipped away and put out of circulation. You know how we bachelors feel. It's always happening, but we know how to take it; we wipe a couple of salt tears out of our moustaches and pretend we are blowing our noses, then whistle a few notes of a gay little tune in a halting breath and shout angrily for another double whisky.

I'm simply longing to see you, Biddy, and hear all your news, and, of course, just exactly how everything came about. I may be able to give you lots of useful advice; I always do, don't I? I tremble to think of all the bonfires over Europe that hence forward must burn with concealed and thwarted ardour. Romania, Greece, France, England …

I'm living in a dingy little room with jug, basin and gas-bracket in horrid Shepherd's Market,[2] at the beck and call of Old Generals who are trying to find me a job as a liaison officer. It's all very sad and depressing.

Balasa, Pomme, Ina and naturally Constantine all send you their love, and long to see you. I do too. Please write to them Bids, and tell them all. Balasa is wretched, as you can imagine, and so am I. Hitler has a terrible lot

to answer for all over the place, hasn't he?

I feel too fed up and empty to write anymore at the moment, so will shut up now, sending you and Mayme all my love. Please write!

Love Paddy
X X

P.S. Most important. Please Bids, could you send me immediately the ring you got from the bank if it is with you. Thanks, it's most urgent!

Had a terribly funny journey home with Henry Nevile,[1] one night in Venice, another in Paris. Why do we all rush to Venice as soon as War breaks out?

Shove over …

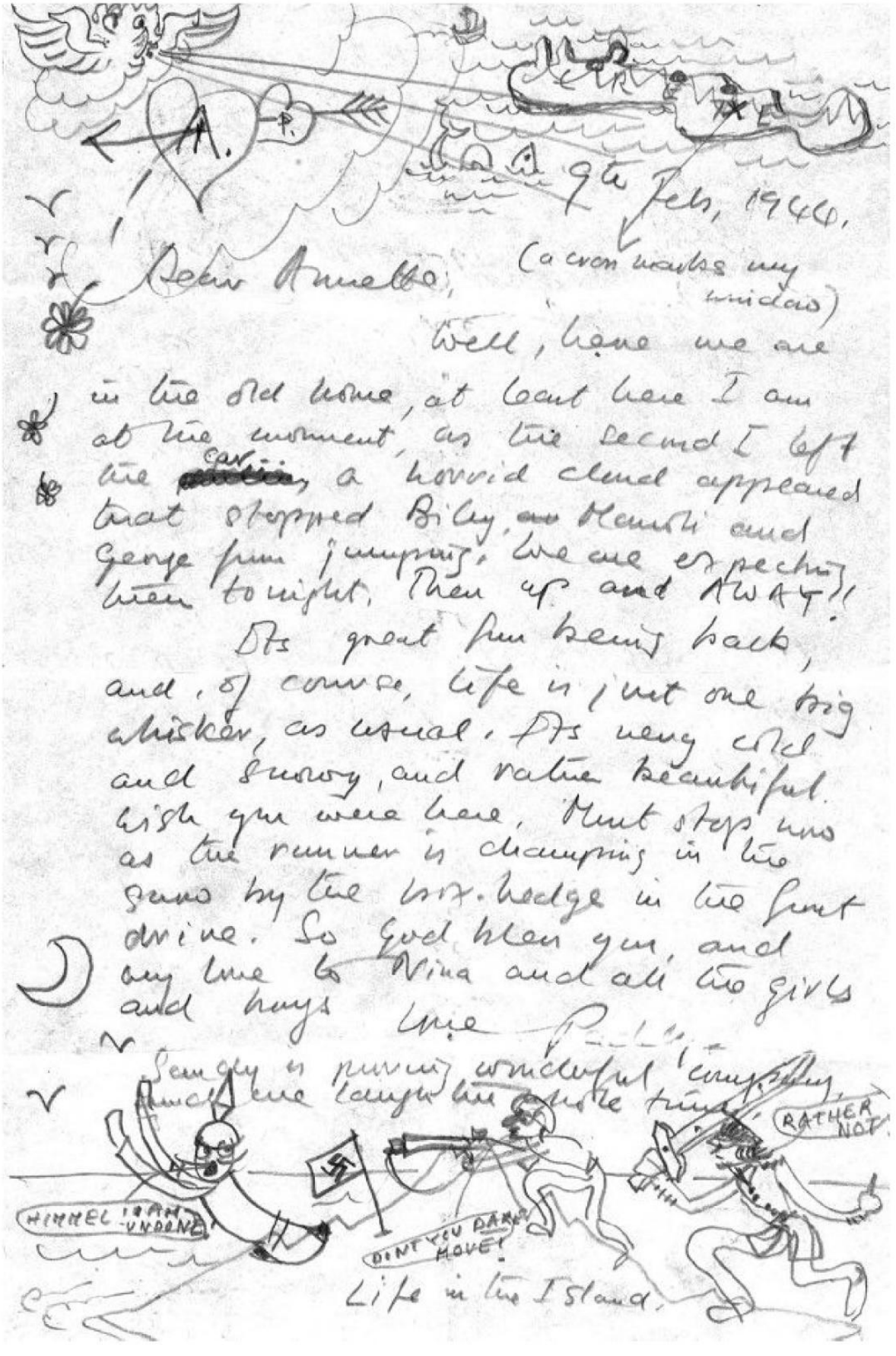
The next letter, addressed to a secretary at SOE HQ Cairo, was written four days after Paddy had dropped by parachute into Axis-occupied Crete, at the start of a daring operation to kidnap General Heinrich Kreipe, commander of the German occupying forces. Its light-hearted tone belies the difficulties already encountered, and the harshness of conditions on the ground. As the letter reveals, Paddy was the only member of the team able to make the jump, and was obliged to wait weeks until the others arrived. No doubt the letter was written to pass the time, and it seems unlikely that it was posted until the party returned in triumph with the captured general to Egypt three months later.

To Annette Crean
9 February 1944

Crete (a cross marks my window)

Dear Annette,

Well, here we are in the old home, at least here I am at the moment, as the second I left the car, a horrid cloud appeared that stopped Billy [Moss], Manoli [Paterakis] and George [Tyrakis] from jumping. We are expecting them tonight.[1] Then Up and AWAY!

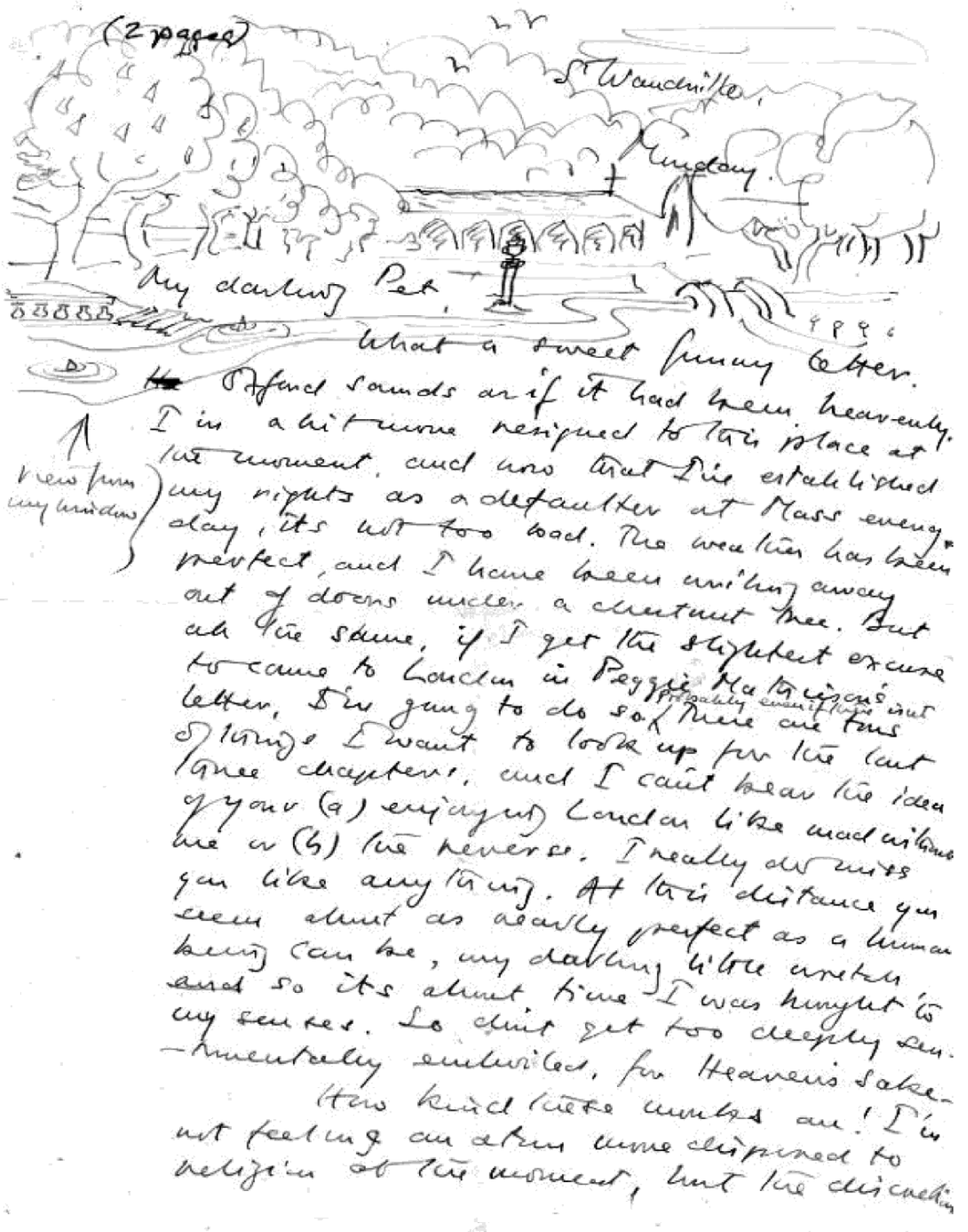


It's great fun being back, and, of course, life is just one big whisker, as usual. It's very cold and snowy, and rather beautiful. Wish you were here.

Must stop now as the runner is champing in the snow by the box-hedge in the front drive.[2] So God bless you, and my love to Nina, and all the girls, and hugs.

Love, Paddy

Paddy met Joan Rayner in Cairo in the final few months of the war. He was not the first to be struck by her beauty, and impressed by her calm, her good sense and her intelligence. 'Like all adorable people Joan Leigh Fermor had something enigmatic about her nature which, together with her wonderful good looks, made her a very seductive presence,' wrote the artist John Craxton, in an obituary published in the Independent in 2003. 'She was also naturally self-effacing. Even in a crowd she maintained a deep and private inner self. Paradoxically, she loved good company and long and lasting friendships. It was her elegance, luminous intelligence, curiosity, understanding and unerring high standards that made her such a perfect muse to her lifelong companion and husband Patrick Leigh Fermor, as well as friend and inspiration to a host of distinguished writers, philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians.'[1]



Like many of those who had distinguished themselves in the war, Paddy found it hard to settle afterwards. For a brief period he worked for the British Council in Athens, but he was not a natural employee. Afterwards he tried to make a living as a writer. Easily distracted, Paddy sought out a succession of retreats where he could work in isolation – including the monastery of Saint-Wandrille in Normandy, from which this next letter was written. He had gone there to concentrate on his first book, based on his travels in Central America and the Caribbean, and eventually published in December 1950

So the H has been very attentive, eh? Hm. 'I can-no-longer-live-without-you,' I suppose. Well, bugger it, neither can I. Oh dear, what fun London sounds! Late at night is a dangerous time. I wake at night at 1.00 a.m. when you are letting yourself into the flat for a last drink with whoever you have been dining with, and pray to Saint Wandrille to put the words 'thus far and no further' into your mouth … Grrr! …

Longer letter tomorrow.

All my love, my darling pet from Paddy

From Saint-Wandrille, Paddy moved on to the monastery of Saint-Jean de Solesmes in Sarthe, near Le Mans.

To Joan Rayner
Tuesday [December 1948]

Abbaye de St Jean de Solesmes
Sablé
Sarthe

Darling sweet little mite,

Thank you so much for your letter, and please forgive me for being so slow in writing. This is going to be in a terrific hurry, as the post is leaving the village in a few minutes. I'll write you a better one after Compline this evening.

Alas I didn't get here till Sunday, as there was no through train on the day you left … Felt frightfully ill. It must have been Groddeck[1] as I recovered at once on meeting François de La Rochefoucauld,[2] who asked me to a St Germain-Balthus-type existentialist party in his bedroom in the Montana,[3] beginning at 1 a.m., if you please. Club St Germain first, then a wonderful party. He lives in a minute room with a beautiful Mlle Schwob.[4] 50 people came (please don't hate me). He is our stern hostess's son, a great beauty and funny, and a capable musician. You will like him. (I repeat, rather timidly, no hatred, darling, please!)

Then here. A much dourer, more Victorian, forbidding place than St W[andrille]. The Plainsong is amazing, but, from every other point of view, it's a dungeon compared to my old home. A lovely comfy room, however, shaded lights, open fire etc. But I don't want to stay long. Please wire at once, my darling pet, and tell me any plans you have made, and if I have time to stay two days at the Trappe.[5] I can't bear to stay away from you much longer. What about the Betjemans?[6]

My minute rodent, I love you and miss you more than I can say. Do let's get married and live happily forever. I simply can't be without you. (What a funny 3 months! You and your H[umanist], me and my abbeys, thank Heavens everything is alright now.) I wish this letter were not so hurried. Did you get my short letter to Isobel's?[7] I do hope it went to the right number. Write or wire at once, my dear little muskin.

All, all my love to darling muskin & mopsy, Your JEMY[8]

While living with Balasha at Băleni in the late 1930s, Paddy had befriended her cousin Alexander Mourouzi, and together they had explored the Danube delta.

During the war years Paddy had been unable to communicate with Balasha or anyone else in Romania, then an enemy country. After the war ended the victorious Soviet Union imposed a harsh communist regime upon the defeated Romanians. Aristocrats like the Cantacuzènes were regarded as enemies of the people; their property was confiscated and their activities monitored. In the summer of 1948 Balasha and Mourouzi tried to escape to Greece in a small boat, but they were caught and briefly imprisoned.

No letters from Paddy to Balasha during this period have survived, but the following letter to Mourouzi – though written in guarded terms because of the danger that it might be intercepted and read by the authorities in Romania – gives some indication of his sympathies. Paddy tries to comfort his friend by reminding him of the life he had known in pre-war Paris. The letter is translated from the original French.

To Alexander Mourouzi
6–9 December 1948

Abbaye de Solesmes
Sablé sur Sarthe
Sarthe

My dear old friend,

Did you ever receive an immensely long letter that I sent you from Guatemala in January, describing my trip there, etc., and in reply to your long and beautiful letter concerning the dreadful *pumpute* [upheaval]? Please forgive me for not having written since. As I explained to Francesca,[1] it's not through lack of friendship or indifference, but from a horrible kind of vanity or perhaps humility, I don't know which, that led me to put off, day after day, writing a letter that would be less than I would have hoped, or disappointing, or imbued with a background of hairshirtedness. Every day my responsibility to write something substantial grew, widened, deformed, until little by little it assumed the proportions of needing to write the entire *Divina Comedia* in order to fill the silence that through my stupidity and vanity I'd allowed to develop, the result of childishness as well as odious egotism and [not] lack of friendship. I'm making such a meal of this because you understand this kind of state of mind, so I hope that you will try to excuse it. Now the news I hear from Lucienne[1] is so awful, that it completely demolishes this absurd edifice, so I am diving in feet first.

All my plans and suggestions I have put in a letter to Francesca – sadly nothing very much, but all I can come up with at the moment. I don't know the current conditions alas but I imagine them to be extremely difficult – I mean travelling conditions, getting around, getting out. But it's wretched, all

Lucienne's friends, mine too, are, one and all, unsettlingly and utterly broke. However, I'm sure that, collectively, we can scrape together something, but nothing compared to what is needed. If by some miracle you manage to get past the last accursed frontier, it will give you the means to steady yourself for a month or two, until something can be arranged. I'm ashamed to be writing so ineffectually, which is why I am castigating myself for being so helpless. I beg you not to think that, just because I am comfortably situated on this side, I lack the imagination to grasp what it must be like: the privations, the humiliations, the troubles that surround you. I can imagine them all too well and I wish I could be there to share them with you rather than giving you useless and naïve advice. I tried as hard as I could to come to Romania after the war but, given the nature of the work I had been involved in during the war, it was completely out of the question.

As you know, Lucienne, who is terrific, received your letters and convened a meeting of your friends at her house: Bernard [—],[2] and Bernard brought Babette. She is now firmly on the Left, which I grasped both between the lines and from hearing her speak, but I feel sure she'll do no harm. Apart from that, she seems kind, good-natured and well-disposed, but alas incapable of doing anything to help. [—] was full of ideas, none of which sadly were feasible. And while I really liked Bernard, it was the same story. Reggie S[1] wasn't there, so I went to see him at his studio in a little street off the Rue des Grands-Augustins. We talked at length about you and your life in Paris, a huge delight for me. He showed me a painting he'd done of his apartment – that you know – in the Rue de la Harpe: two shutters open out onto a dizzying view of tumbledown red-tiled roofs and smoking chimney stacks, the vague contours of the Rue de la Huchette and the Rue du Chat-qui-Pêche, while in the background the tower of Notre Dame stands out against a spring sky. All the joy, the air, the light, within it. He paints terrifically well and in a few weeks' time is having an exhibition, posters are already going up across Paris. He and I went through the various options, starting with contacting friends on the Left, that is if we could find them. I found myself saying that I felt it would be a complete waste of time, things being as they are. I now wonder if it was the right thing to say. What do you think?

He had another idea, about a Romanian who comes and goes, not left wing, the contact being a local restaurant owner. I went to meet him five times but he never showed up, then making it known, via an intermediary, that he wanted nothing to do with it. I don't have to tell you that no names were exchanged.

Reggie told me that he thinks it better he doesn't write, as too many letters would only draw attention to you. However, like the others for that matter, he sends you his best wishes, fondest memories and looks forward enormously to seeing you (!). The day after our meeting, I set out to follow the little plan he had drawn, starting at the Rue Soufflot, then down to the

Place Adrien Herr.[2] The plaque by the door still bore the name of 'Grandmaison'.[3] I passed under two arches, and found myself in a little garden where the flowers had all passed their best. Then up into a funereal hall (noticing a pile of folded napkins stacked up against one of the dining room windows). Eventually an old servant appeared who told me that Grandmaison had died during the war and that the staff had all changed. How sad it was! I asked if I could go upstairs 'to take a look'. She refused, in an extremely ungracious way. Once she'd left, I tiptoed up the staircase (worn down by the feet of Popo, Martine and Montet!), until I reached the mezzanine at which point the old Gorgon reappeared and chased me out, yelling like a banshee, as if I'd been planning to rob or rape someone. I spent half an hour on the terrace of the little bistro that you get to by a kind of ladder, where I had a beer and watched the goings on in the boarding house of the girls' school opposite, but above all remembering those wonderful stories of yours, laughing out loud, to the astonishment of the only other customer, an old plumber complete with tool bag. Then, down at street level again, I cut through the Rue l'Arbalète to the Rue Mouffetard and the Rue Monge where I visited the mosque. Walking up the astonishing Rue Mouffetard I reached the Pantheon and thence to the Jardin du Luxembourg, down to the Boul[evard] St Michel. Two more beers at Chez Dupont and then, by way of Place St-André des Arts, found my way back to the minuscule hotel where I used to live, at the corner of the Rue de Seine and the Rue Buci, above a horse butcher's. Looking out of my window I used to see the whole of the Rue de Seine market, fish, vegetables, practically blocking the lanes. My bedroom was on the corner where I would look down on three horses' heads apparently nailed to the floor below mine, which always gave me a pleasing sensation of driving a troika.

The life of this *quartier* revolves around the Place St-Germain-des-Prés, and the Cafés Flore and Deux Magots, Royal St Germain and La Reine Blanche serve as a kind of fortress to the doctrines of the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, a philosophy which consists of a special kind of walk, accent, clothes, hairstyle etc. and which leads to regular punch-ups with the anti-existentialists. The atmosphere, the life, are delightful. I know that you are familiar with all of this and I am sure that, in spite of all your difficulties, though it seems impossible now, you'll be back here.

Are you writing now, A[lexander]? I so enjoyed what you wrote back then. I fear that the current situation – the anxiety and loss you're having to endure – is hardly conducive to work. As for me, I'm trying to turn myself into a writer. I find it terribly hard but since it's the only thing I like, I have to persevere. I've had a few articles published recently and I'm busy writing a book about the journey from which I've recently returned. The least distraction – even the most boring thing – is excuse enough to prevent me from actually working and this is the reason I hide myself away in monasteries. I spent five weeks in the Abbaye de St Wandrille in Normandy,

two weeks here, and tomorrow I leave for La Grande Trappe for ten days. It's the only means I have of writing anything alas. I believe that we both suffer, literarily speaking, from the same evil – an inability to start and a lack of faith in what we do because of our high standards – a thing brilliantly described in *Oblomov* by Goncharov.[1] Write to me soon, tell me what you are thinking, reading, writing. I have absolutely no idea how, but I feel sure these vicissitudes will be overcome and that Byzantium will be saved.[2]

With fraternal greetings, affectionately, Patrick

Encouraged by Harold Nicolson, who had taken an interest in his writing, Paddy sent a copy of his poem 'Greek Archipelagoes' to John Lehmann, editor of the 'Penguin New Writing' series. This may have been awkward for Paddy, because ten years earlier he and Lehmann had clashed at a cocktail party over the issue of support for the Spanish Republic. They had 'locked horns in a furious debate', and 'unforgivable things' had been said, or so he told his biographer Artemis Cooper half a century later: indeed he claimed that they never spoke to one another again. This letter suggests otherwise. The poem appeared in Penguin New Writing, No. 37*, published in 1949.*

To John Lehmann
undated [December 1948]

Hôtel de la Louisiane
Rue de Seine
Paris 6ème

Dear Mr Lehmann,

Thank you for your letter, which I have just received at the end of a chain of re-directions. I am delighted that you enjoyed the poem about the Greek archipelagos, and very excited at the thought of seeing it in Penguin New Writing.[1]

I left the Abbaye de Saint Wandrille a week ago and find Paris bewilderingly noisy; and before returning to England, am going to see what the Monastery of La Grande Trappe, on the Norman–Breton border, is like. A week of absolute silence should be a valuable and curious experience in the present century.

I will certainly telephone you when I return to London, and look forward very much to meeting you.

Yours sincerely
Patrick Leigh-Fermor

Cyril Connolly's infatuation with Joan was a complicating factor for Paddy, but the two men were able to maintain cordial relations nonetheless.

me and depression was, for about ¼ of an hour, tissue-paper thin; but I took measures to thicken it, and am safe now. I'm in a wine shop off one of the minor squares of Lisbon, a towering, bottle-lined place, with a hand-knitted marble inlay floor and spittoons and three or four ragged men in velour hats at the end of an echoing vista. As an atmosphere, *sympa* (as they say),[3] and promising.

Now, quick recapitulation. I went to Annie Rothermere's[1] after you left, it was very nice – Robin, Mary,[2] Peter Q[uennell], etc. Then I did what I imagine to be 'tying up all the loose ends' (*penses-tu*!)[3] all through the afternoon; had dinner with Anne Millard[4] at that Greek restaurant with the *kapheneion*[5] – [illegible], and then went to the Gargoyle,[6] (where Anne soon left) and spent the evening, first upstairs, then drinking brandy in David [Tennant]'s flat, with Phillip [Toynbee], David, Derek Jackson[7] & [the artist] Francis Bacon. David was entirely unboring and informative about Spain. We were all rather drunk. Derek and Francis exchanged pecks between drinks like two bullfinches in a cage. It was rather sweet, and utterly un-rebarbative.

Well, I caught the ship at Liverpool next day (the fellow-tourist passengers were quite fun: two priests of St Vincent de Paul, heading for Indian parishes 1,000 miles up the Amazon – beyond Manaos, the ship's Brazilian terminus – two terrible Scotch nurses, an elderly, mincing Ambassador's niece with bony wrists a-clink with seals and amulets, and a nice old Portuguese historian). The ship stopped (to my surprise, I don't know why) at Oporto, so I got off there, stopped at a 5/-[8] pension, and had three weeks' dirty shirts laundered by the old peasant woman there for 3/-[1] in three hours. I went to see San Francisco, a lovely Manueline[2] church, and then the late 18th Century Association building of the English Port Growers. An entrancing building like a beautiful English country house on the banks of the Douro, all out of granite, with a fine English 18th century façade, a wonderful flight of granite stairs, and delicious rooms full of Queen Anne and Chippendale furniture, the most delicately festooned plaster ceiling in libraries and ballrooms and saloon after saloon; full, too, of the portraits of old port-growers in full-bottomed and tie-back wigs, then regency stocks; all of them, one of their descendants told me, as, glass in hand, we walked from room to empty room all bright with polish and beeswax, squires, scholars (see *They Went to Portugal* by Rose Macaulay) like Whitehead,[3] and Warre the Eton headmaster,[4] with an occasional duellist and blackguard, and a galaxy of Peninsular War heroes. He asked me to dinner at his house at the mouth of the Douro, where I met a Madrid colleague of yours[5] called Cobb, who seemed rather nice, and very instructed about Portugal. They gave me two tremendous bottles of port which I carried away with me, when I left by bus this morning. He is called Ron[ald] Symington, a charming, shy friendly person with an equally nice wife.[6]

I left Oporto by bus at dawn – so beautiful, across an iron rainbow of a

bridge poised above the windings of the Douro; and, as we rattled on, a lovely sylvan upland world emerged – forests of Mediterranean pine and the clean pale blue air I've been longing to breathe, sinking to valleys full of young yellow-gold corn and olive groves with the peasants scything hay and leaving it in silver green swathes under the trees; solid-wheeled ox-carts, and women in bright, scallop edged woollen scarves filling tapering kegs with the slats and hoops painted different and jarring colours, at monumental fountains. Vines are putting pale green shoots out everywhere, and anemones and poppies are scattered over everything. Once we sank into a marshy valley, where the fen was coated with lilies, and an old bridge crossed it, span after span under osiers, like the shallow trajectories of a bouncing ball. The bus stopped at Coimbra for an hour at midday, so I managed to clamber up to the university and see those three staggering library rooms with their galleries poised on slender gilded and upturned obelisks[1] and, just before the bus left, the Manueline church of Santa Cruz, with an organ sprouting trumpets like the Last Judgement, and *azulejos* [tiled walls] depicting the exploits of Vasco da Gama. We stopped for a tantalising ten minutes at Batalha, the abbey erected in the 14th century (very English or French looking) to celebrate the victory of Portugal over Castille. There are the tallest late Gothic pillars in the nave I've ever seen, and a lovely tomb of the victorious king, Don João, and his English wife, Phillipa of Lancaster (John of Gaunt's daughter, mother of Henry the Navigator – the Infante Henrique, as they call him here). The King's and the Queen's hands are joined; pretty and grave and moving. Then south again, to the other great abbey of Alcobaça, which celebrates his victory over the Moors; and went to the coast, where the sailors wear Portuguese tartan shirts (like Dick's) and tasseled jellybag hats and go to sea in queer, brightly painted, spike-prowed boats. They are descended from the Phoenicians, and look it.

South again then, between castled hills, to Torres Vedras (the centre of Wellington's line against Soult and Junot[2]) and finally, after a violet and amber sunset, into Lisbon after dark, where I've found a room for the night up seven flights of stairs in a back street off one of the squares. Incredibly sordid, but run by a blue-grey-chinned ex-village schoolmaster and his peasant wife – v. kind, like all the Portuguese I've met; they really are nice, soft, sweet people, but with none of the bite and toughness of the Spaniards. I long for that. We drank half of one of my bottles of port together, and they directed me here.

Dinner (which I've eaten while writing this) was half execrable, half delicious: the bad part was the cod, the *bacalhau*, with potatoes and spinach; the good part, *vinho verde do minho*, green i.e. new, young red wine, *pétillant*; it has a head on it like Guinness when poured out, which quickly subsides; excellent; and the soup *à la Alentejana*, with a poached egg in the middle, and green on the surface with some saw-edged leaf. I asked what it was, and the waiter wrote down: *coentros, erva da margem*

dos rios; a sort of cress, I think, a herb from the river's margin.[1]

My darling, I think I'll catch the bus for Evora (E. of Lisbon) tomorrow night; cross the Spanish frontier at Badajoz, and then go south through Estremadura to Seville, and so to Andalusia, and Julian's:[2] fitting in, if I can, late Maundy Thursday and Good Friday of Semana Santa [Holy Week] in Seville. All rooms will be taken, I think, so I'll put my luggage somewhere, and sleep on a bench. I'm longing to be at Grazalema, these long bus journeys are fairly tiring, but they give me a lovely, half forgotten feeling of every inch of my long body aching, my eyelashes caked with dust, and an accumulation of such a quantity of dazzling beauty in my head – falling one on top of each other like a pack of cards, which I won't be able to shuffle and deal till I've been quiet for a day or two – at Grazalema, I hope – and there is so much to come between then & now.

I've missed you much, my darling angel, and I <u>do hope</u> you'll come to Spain. Please, please do. Above all, don't worry and fret and drown yourself in some awful English balloon-glass, which I'm sure, is the un-truest crystal to guide anyone.[1] I'm off on one of those searches, (which I bet will end in a *bec de gaz*[2]) for a *fados*[3] singer on the other bank of the Tagus that the Portuguese historian told me about. All, all my love, my darling, darling, little Joan, and very many ex-rodentish hugs.

Love love love
Paddy

A guitarist, followed by a tame claque of soaks, has just entered; a nice drunkard's whispering guitarist, with his familiars quietly singing and humming the refrain.

Please give my love to Graham, if he's at Tumbledown.[4]

<u>Come to Spain</u>. There is some intrinsic health and sense in these deluges of wine and pale clear blue sky. It strikes me that I've been not very clear (too diffident out of not wanting to interfere with your right of choice) to let you know how much I miss you and love you. Also, Spain and Andalusia are unfair trappings. I love <u>you</u>, but come for <u>them</u>. It'll be alright, my poor darling, sweet, sweet Joan. You as a friend and a lover are almost (not quite) equally precious things. This language (Portuguese) is incomprehensible – no vowels, it might be Polish, with all these consonants – an endless succession of the syllable 'Shoinsh'.

P.

To Joan Rayner — Jerez de la Frontera
8/9 April 1950

My darling pet,

I've had rather a full, but uncoordinated time since I last wrote to you. I

was woken up early by the couple in my pension (both of whom came from the Azores), and all the people Robin Fedden had given me letters for were out of Lisbon, so I was befriended all day by a fat, kind Nico Baltazzi-Nicky Melas[1] figure called the Count of Mafra[2] and went with him to see the Manueline churches and the most splendid collection of state coaches in the world. We had luncheon in a Taverna-ish restaurant called the Leão d'Ouro (Châteaubriands the size of Baedekers smothered with béarnaise, but first great plates of clams cooked with onions, garlic, saffron and sliced pimento, with a soup sauce better than any bouillabaisse). He's a godfather of about 18 people, but a bachelor-type of person of the Athenian variety,[3] warm, kind, convivial, very Micky-ish. I dined at his house, then we visited several friends, ending up with a very nice Portugee called John Marques, who is married to Mrs Belloc Lowndes's daughter; charming, intelligent, freakishly lettered and erudite.[4] Here we drank too much, and, on the way out in the moonlight, I'm sorry to say, Mafra fell down the stairs (he is an enormous man) and broke his collar-bone. I saw him home to bed.

Eastwards across Portugal next day, lovely rolling hills, covered with olive and forests of cork oak and castles on islands in the Tagus and across the Spanish border at Badajoz; across Estremadura, through the Sierra Morena, and into the suburbs of Seville at 10 o'clock on Maundy Thursday night. The town was chocked with the Semana Santa crowd, and one moved about a furlong an hour. The first people I met, of course, were Bill & Annie Davis[1] with Eldred (?) Curwen,[2] Mrs [Peggy] Bainbridge,[3] a loathsome munitions millionaire called Sir Douglas Orr-Lewis[4] with his diamond-smothered Russian girlfriend. All awful except for Bill (whom I like, I must say) and Annie (who I would like more if she was a fraction more intelligent). I nearly lost them in the mob outside the church of the Marareña, where there must have been about 10,000 people who burst into a furore of clapping and cheers as the enormous Marareña virgin came out (every one murmuring *Mira la! ¡Mira la! ¡Qué bonita, la guapa! Qué fotografia!*[5] etc.), preceded by a hundred Roman soldiers in full armour and huge ostrich feather plumes, soldiers playing slow-marches on muffled drums etc. (You've probably seen it.) I managed to crawl into the sacristy while they were all, cigars in mouth, dressing up, and hundreds of boys putting on velvet and gold dalmatics and ruffs, all in candlelight under white baroque vaults – the closest one could get to the Funeral of Count Orgáz.[6] The procession went through the narrow streets of the poorest quarters, and the Marareña's baldaquin got caught again and again in the clothes and tramlines, and had to stop even more often for *saetas* – improvised sung tunes in a minor key from windows – some of them wonderful, slow and heartbreaking howling ones of enormous complexity. I'm sure the only criterion of these is whether or not they make the hair on your nape prickle. I wandered about till 8 a.m., the town still full of processions, but all the soldiers smoking, and the cafés full of *cagoulards*[1]

jovially drinking with their hoods rolled up, next to whores whose brothels had just shut – the claustrophobia was as dense as Les Saintes Maries [de la Mer],[2] but it had a mood of Goya, Greco and Doré that was extraordinary. A lovely turquoise dawn over Seville, and the streets fuller than ever. I was put up on the sofa of a student I met in a café, which was as well, as the few hotels I had tried at were full.

The same thing all next day (lunch & dinner with the Davis's, who were avid for London gossip), and to bed in the most beautiful and cheap pension in the Santa Cruz quarter – a lovely *Mudéjar*[3] patio, and a monkish, whitewashed room like the one we had in Antigua (Guatemala). I'd long ago reached saturation point, and won't be able to see read or hear about anything to do with religion for quite a long time. I could never see the Semana Santa again, and think the Spaniards – the Andalusians anyway – must have a good strong streak of insanity.

Yesterday Bill, Orr-Lewis, Curwen and I drove out to see the six bulls for Sunday's (today's) fight, and sat drinking white wine & eating langoustines on a terrace above their pen, and then I caught a train for Cadiz (where I had telegraphed Julian [Pitt-Rivers] to telephone me – a general breakdown had kept us out of touch and I was beginning to despair. Trains and buses – how right you are darling! – are hellishly irregular.) I fell asleep in the train, woke up with a start at a station I thought was Cadiz, and only realised as it steamed away that it was Jerez, so took a broken-down taxi all the way to Cadiz, a lovely drive along the Guadalete across the Cadiz salt-flats. A French-speaking workman in Cadiz spoke with hatred of the boss here,[1] and of the poverty (which, as you know, knocks you flat the moment you get here), of the general suspicion and nark-ridden and haunted atmosphere; of villagers bumped off and their bodies put on mules and led round the countryside as an example against feeding maquisards, etc. etc. I had to come back here today (after looking at the Murillos and Zurbaráns[2] in Cadiz), and am meeting our host in his local town at the end of a bus journey tomorrow. It sounds so lovely, and I do long to be there. I'm tired of travelling, and still shagged out from Seville. The country is so beautiful – all a brilliant green, with smears of some lilac herb, and dazzling white villages, and Jerez (which I reached at sunset) full, even now at 1.00 a.m., of perambulating citizens and the smell of orange blossom and cyclamen. This café is still crowded, half the women are in combs and mantillas from the morning's ceremonies, the balconies are hung with armorial carpets, and the tauromachic[3] clubs full of old men arguing behind their plate-glass club windows. J[ulian]'s house, apparently, is on the eyebrow of a steep gorge – I long to lie there in the sun, & work and talk and not move. Do, do come![4] I expect I'll get a letter from you tomorrow. My bus leaves at 6 a.m.! More news later.

All my love, my own darling, and many hugs and kisses from

My dear Dick,

How funny! I was just thinking about you, and determining to write belated New Year's Greetings when rat! tat! tat! on the knocker, and in comes the *facteur* with yr astonishing Miró Christmas card. You cld have knocked me over with a (wait for it) feather. Dick, how are you? It's lovely to have even a brief hint of your doings. Are you going back to the Agora next/this summer? I don't know if I shall manage to get to Greece. I'd love to, but it rather depends on dough. That book has now come out in the States, and is about to in France, so perhaps something will roll in. Not much seems to have so far, or I've spent it all years ago, or something! I've settled down here for the winter solid to get through my book on Greece – it's fearfully hard work, and rather difficult, but I'm enjoying it immensely. I've been lent this little farmhouse by my absent hostess (she's charming, and a Syrian, which makes me think of the area as Eure of the Chaldees[1]). My house-scrounging technique is becoming suspiciously slick; I must watch it. Joan has just left after spending Christmas here with her nice brother, and expressly told me to send her love if I wrote. She will [come here] off and on, and I sneak off to Paris for a day now and then. If you come to [the] Eure before May, come and stay a bit. It's rather nice – cold outside, but huge fires indoors and lots of books. At the moment there is a wind straight from Novaya Zemlya, mist like a leak from the *Nibelungenlied*,[2] and, when that lets up, a downpour that gives you the sensation of being in a diving-bell. But when you can see it, it's charming, rolling country, with a big river, the Eure, winding through willows and cypresses and bare poplars, cloudy with mistletoe receding in Holbein-ish vistas. The inhabitants are moustachioed, calvados-logged Merovingians – stunted, clogged and monosyllabic, which is a mercy, and there's no temptation to royster with them. Don't you think my hostess has a splendidly Sheridan-esque name?

> Scene: Bath. Enter Lady Smart, Sir Volatile Quicksilver severally, and unobserved, Mr Sneak.
>
> Lady S: Zounds, Sir Volatile, are you not well?
>
> Sir V.Q.: Madam, I swear your ladyship's eyes wreak more carnage than powder and shot! Two salvoes have battered down the demilune and the barbican, the citadel (touches his breast) is taken, and the garrison shows the flag of truce (mops eyes with handkerchief).
>
> Lady S: La, dear toad, we must console the toad for his surrender. (They embrace.)
>
> Mr S: Tut! I must straight to my Lady Viper, and inform her of the issue. (exit furtively, etc., etc.).

No more room left, but Dick, do write and tell me your news, and probably see you later in the year. Happy New Year, and all the rest!

As ever, Paddy

In the early 1950s Paddy came to know Lady Diana Cooper, a glamorous figure then in her sixties; in her prime she had often been described as the most beautiful young woman in England. An actress on stage and screen, married to a prominent Conservative politician, she was a celebrity, the subject of countless portraits, profiles and articles in newspapers and magazines.

She and Paddy would maintain a correspondence until her death, almost four decades later. His letters were written to amuse and entertain; they were affectionate and not a little flirtatious, despite the twenty-three-year difference in age. Paddy usually addressed her as 'darling'; she addressed him as 'Paddles'. 'Being alone with you is what I like best, a delight of which I can never tire,' he would write to her in March 1953.

The following letter was written after he and Joan had spent a weekend with Diana and her husband Duff at the exquisite eighteenth-century house, the Château de Saint-Firmin, that they rented in the grounds of the Château de Chantilly after he had retired from his last post as British Ambassador to France.

To Diana Cooper
3 May 1952

Gadencourt
Pacy-sur-Eure
Eure

Dearest Diana,

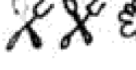
How wretched it was, all separating after that lovely luncheon at the Coq Chantant, end of the happiest stay anybody has had for years and years. It really was perfection from start to finish, and thank you both 1,000s of times. Heavens, what a lot we laughed. I think the funniest actual incident was Lady Rootes's[1] visit – I wonder what she would have been like if Joan hadn't taken the edge off her, as it were. I wake up in the night even now, on the brink of screaming at the memory of that terrible alligator face. I wonder if she has the Evil Eye? It really is so seldom that one has absolutely perfect times, when one is unbetterably happy the whole time, that I think one ought to wallow like anything in retrospect as well as at the time – I'm still trailing clouds of glory from Chantilly, and remembering conversations and jokes and Duff reading Swinburne and Browning so beautifully, while you listened in a quiet transport of blubbing:

(Two liquid baths, two weeping motions
Portable and compendious oceans),[2]

and our lovely out-of-doors luncheons by the *glycine* [wisteria]-covered stables and in the front of the house; also our strange walk after the hunting tea, following a paper chase of iguanas and toucans and jaguars and all one's favourite animals; and the Grand Meaulnes Priory[3] with the beautiful children and that black Satanic bandog. Lots of heavenly things to think

about for ages.

The drive to Paris wasn't nearly as bad as Joan feared – she whizzed along, charioted by Bacchus and his (wait for it) pards,[4] and it was mugget mugget all the way. We dined out of doors opposite the Odéon with Isobel Lambert, poor Constant L's widow,[1] and after Joan and she had gone to bed, I had a bout of noctambulism, ending up in the small hours in a faintly louche place called the Café de l'Echaudé, just off the Place de Furstenberg, where Delacroix's studio is. At the next table in this extraordinary grotto sat five immense negroes – jet black, with beautifully shaped heads, talking quietly together in some African dialect. One was eating a plate of bright orange spaghetti, the others were throwing huge ivory dice in a tray lined with green baize, with lovely long [illegible] and ebony hands. I scraped acquaintance, of course, and learnt that four were Wolloffs from Dakar in Senegal, the other a member of the warlike Fong tribe of Dahomey, where most of Voodoo comes from. After a few *fines à l'eau* [brandies and water] they were all singing, very quietly, a southern Saharan war song, and tapping the tom-tom measure with those long fingers. The Fong told me he came from a grand family that once ruled from Abomey, in Upper Dahomey, to the Haute Volta river, and that on the ruler's birthday 100 years ago, sometimes as many as a thousand tribesmen were beheaded – one after the other, with huge scimitars. Towards the end of the ceremony, the Prince would sometimes get bored, and move off to dinner while the holocaust went on, skipping the last hundred or so. I like to think of this immense black potentate in a green and scarlet brocade toga, stifling a yawn, waving democratically to the cheering populace under the skull-decked battlements, and sauntering indoors with his glittering retinue while the rest of his chopping was rushed through … (something hallucinatory about decapitations – poor Lady Jane Grey's head falling off, all Ascham's teaching, the Latin & Greek & arithmetic & philosophy & geometry suddenly expiring on the straw like a puff of smoke[2]). I got to bed in the end shortly before dawn. We had luncheon at the Cretan place, where of course I couldn't resist another lump of camel,[3] so arrived back here burning with a hard, gem-like flame,[1] and, owing to the previous night's wanderings, feeling older than the rocks on which I sat …

We're off tomorrow, stopping for a last valedictory guzzle at the Cygne at Totes, outside Dieppe[2] ( *quenelles de brochet à l'épicurienne, langouste à la Newburg, poulet maison* etc.). I hate leaving here [Gadencourt].[3] It's looking lovely in the moment, in the big wildish garden behind the house that you never saw, where I am writing this under an apple tree. Blue and white irises everywhere and a tremendous smell of wisteria, very lyrical now just as evening comes on – a sad and elegiac feeling: big soft shadows on the newly mown grass under the trees, the sound of a pair of clogs clumping home on the other side of the hedge, navy blue swallows

darting and wheeling, and a nightingale from the trees over by the Eure, ¼ mile away. It's just about time Pierino[4] would [be] shutting the shutters at Chantilly, and the idea of that lovely first drink of the evening (that unconscious, magnetic, almost sleepwalking convergence on the frescoed chamber of mysteries that only an expert on animal and bird migration could explain) begins to blossom in all our minds. The saddest thing of all is that this breaks up Chantilly & Gadencourt being (almost) neighbours. No more pricking across Normandy & the Ile de France to meet for gastronomic Fields of the Cloth of Gold halfway! Must stop now, as it's getting too dark to see. Many many thanks and love to you both again, dearest Diana, and see you in a few days in London.

Love from Paddy

If you are free for a second in London, do please telephone Joan on MUS 8566. My permanent address is (please put it in your book!) Travellers, Pall Mall, S.W.1, WHI 8688 (U.K.)

P.S. Dreamy Joan, wandering in the Palais Royal yesterday afternoon to take some photographs, sat down on a bench, where she was soon joined by a young man who gazed at her with great sloe eyes, and said, '*Madame, on dirait que le soleil joue à cache-cache aujourd'hui.*'[1] Isn't that a charming overture?

To Diana Cooper
17 July 1952

Cimbrone
Ravello
Golfo di Salerno

Darling Diana,

I loved your breakdown letter, waiting for Pierino to come and tug the Simca back to Chantilly with the station-waggon, like *The Fighting Temeraire* in reverse;[2] and pray for some other small mishap and another letter. Alas, I only got it after it had travelled all over the place, on the brink of leaving England, and have been on the move ever since, which is the reason for this rather rude delay in answering. The awful thing is that I expect you are both on the high seas at the moment, and this letter has as little chance of reaching you quickly as if I put it inside a bottle and threw it out of the window into the Gulf of Salerno. I do wish we were all together here, bathing and talking all day and lying about and reading out loud, like that heavenly last stay at Chantilly shifted south. As it is, things here are alright, but far from ideal. I'll tell you all about it later on.

Like everyone else I met, I was tremendously excited and cheered up by the birthday honours,[1] mixed with the feeling that it was about time too: why hadn't the brutes done something about it years ago? You're probably both bored by the general enthusiasm about it by now, but that, and Ld

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Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK

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First published in Great Britain 2018
This edition published 2019
This electronic edition first published in Great Britain 2018

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication data has been applied for

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4088-9366-1; PB: 978-1-4088-9369-2; eBook: 978-1-4088-9367-8

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