



SUPPLEMENTARY LETTERS 1960–1975

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SUPPLEMENTARY LETTERS 1960–1975

Most of these letters do not appear in *Building: Letters 1960–1975*, being later discoveries. More annotation may be provided later, but for now the texts are made available here for the convenience of readers. Sources are given at the end of letters.

Three (asterisked) letters from the published volume are also included, because only carbon copies were available to the editors; since then top copies have come to light in the New York Public Library, which houses the bulk of the *New York Review of Books* archive, and manuscript additions and alterations made by Berlin are shown here in red.

TO JOHN SPARROW

30 September 1960

Headington House

My dear Warden,

I enclose a Notice of Motion which Monteith has asked me to sign. I have done so, with qualms. I should prefer three-fourths myself, and if this is concretely suggested by someone, may rat.

May I make two suggestions – only suggestions, only suggestions –

(a) That dear Stuart be put on the Domestic Committee – the appropriate home for all old Domestic Bursars.

(b) That Con O'Neill, now a widower, be elected to a £50 Fellowship. True, it is said that he is going away as Minister or Ambassador to Finland. Nevertheless he is a bachelor: a tremendous status: and although we could wait until he came back, he might be married then (so far as I know he has no matrimonial plans at the moment), and I think it would be pure gain to lure him back. I should therefore be prepared to conceal my knowledge of his impending move (though someone else may reveal it) and if revealed play it down.

All this will annoy Lionel Butler even more. If you are prepared to face that, so am I.

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(c) When are we to meet? Would you please telephone immediately on receipt of this? Please?

Yours, with much *love*

Isaiah

All Souls

TO EDWARD WEEKS

25 April 1961 [*manuscript*]

As from All Souls
(in fact, Portofino, Italy)

Dear Ted

Thank you for your letter. No, indeed I've not been to Israel more than thrice in the last dozen years or so; altho' having been away from it for a long time, & being curious, I may go soonish.

I *cannot*, alas, “do” Ben Gurion. I do not know him well enough: I disagree with him too often; I admire & think him terrible and splendid, but, like de Gaulle (whom he much resembles in dwelling with heroes of the past very vividly & seeing himself in dramatized historical perspective) he is not someone I can successfully describe. Churchill I didn't know at all; so that was just a review, another matter. B. G. – if at all, only posthumously, for reasons you will well understand – if then: but perhaps not at all. I wish I could tell you about Israeli culture; I know so little of it, I am ashamed to say. Yakov Talmon of Jerusalem University (a historian known in U.S. for his book on Totalitarian Democracy) could tell you; or a nice man called *Ephraim Broido* who edits a highbrow periodical in Tel Aviv (the Israel cultural attaché – surely there is one – in Washington wd forward a letter: I haven't his address). he is much the most reliable intellectual “consultant”.

Till May!

yrs

Isaiah

Perhaps Trevor Roper's articles on Eichmann's trials in the Sunday Times are worth reproducing: I feel sure they will be.

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Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

TO DAVID CARVER¹

6 October 1961

Headington House

Dear Carver,

Thank you for your letter of 5 October. The account of your conversation with Surkov² does not of course surprise me in the least. They have made up their mind to do exactly what Crankshaw said they intended to do, and that is a decision taken well above Surkov's head, and he is merely the tough and cynical executant.

All that happened in that never-to-be-forgotten bus journey from Covent Garden at midnight to Wiston House was that after Surkov had revealed the full depth of Madame I[vinskaya]'s depravity, and other members of his party joined in about her financial dishonesty and acts likely to undermine the financial policy of the Soviet Union, etc., Surkov finally said, with a sort of crocodile smile, that perhaps she would not have to stay in prison all the eight years, or whatever it was – perhaps 'a year or two' (that is my recollection) would be enough. I said that one year was better than two, and six months better than one year, to which he rejoined nothing at all and spent himself on amiabilities about Baroness Budberg and other London friends.

I do not myself believe that anything done to expose Surkov will help Madame I. – I think they have made up their minds about that and Surkov is merely reproducing a carefully officially prepared line to which they all stick. He may, being an exceedingly clever man, have helped to work out the official version, but once it is adopted it ceases to be his property, and his personal fate has

¹ Secretary of International PEN 1951–74. IB had joined PEN in 1961. The letter is about the Soviet mistreatment of Boris Pasternak's mistress, Olga Ivinskaya.

² Aleksey Aleksandrovich Surkov (1899–1983), head of the Soviet Union of Writers 1953–9.

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little to do with the fate of the victims. The only thing which could save them would be a change of heart on the part of some person in real authority from Mr K[rushchev] downwards – and how that is to be compassed I have no idea. If the people I still preserve a tenuous connection with inside the Soviet Union are not to get into further trouble (they have had a good deal already – I do not know if I ever told you about my conversations with various semi-condemned writers), it were best if my name were kept out of this. But there is no harm in saying, perhaps, that Surkov, in general conversation with no one in particular, seemed to hold out hope of a shorter sentence owing to the general clemency and humanity of the Soviet authorities (or similar rot).

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah Berlin

McFarlin Library Special Collections, University of Tulsa

TO DAVID CARVER

12 October 1961

Headington House

Dear Carver,

Thank you very much for your letter and the excellent enclosure. I thought your talk absolutely appropriate and I hope it penetrates Surkov's thick hide to the necessary depth. But I fear he is a hopeless case. And so are they all, including Ehrenburg, who is falsely credited with civic courage. I am sure there is nothing more to be done at present; and it is very creditable that the sharpest voices were raised in England. I hope that you will have sent copies of your talk to the other national centres of PEN.

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah Berlin

McFarlin Library Special Collections, University of Tulsa

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A FIRE AT HARVARD

From September 1962 till January 1963 IB was Ford Visiting Research Fellow at Harvard, living in Lowell House. Soon after his arrival he caused a fire in his room, as he describes in letters to his stepsons Peter and Philippe Halban (B 116–17, 127). By chance it was at this moment that Kay DeLuca,³ who had just been appointed as his secretary, first encountered him. In 2019, now Kay J. Lisle, she recalled the experience. She remembers that it was she who extinguished the fire, but in IB's account this role was his.

I was twenty-one years old, newly married and living in Harvard married students' housing. I went to the Harvard Employment Office and was sent to Lowell House to become someone's secretary. Women were not allowed to enter Lowell House then – so I had to be checked in. I remember climbing the stairs to a particular room; hearing shouting, I knocked on the door and a wild-looking man flung the door open and waved at his bed. It was on fire. He was attempting to make a cup of tea with one of those curly implements one sticks into a cup of water. I put the fire out. I couldn't make out much of what he was saying, but he picked up a dictaphone and put it in my arms and showed me the door. Outside was a woman who was mature and may have been more competent. I said, 'I believe I got the job!'

It took a while before I got used to his voice and the speed of his speech on those dictaphone tapes. I believe he was writing something on Kerensky. He would ask me to do errands occasionally – like going to Leavitt and Pierce to pick up his cigars. Often when I would return to his room to deliver whatever I had typed he would say: 'Call Aaron Copeland, call Nathan Milstein, call Leonard Bernstein. Get Arthur Schlesinger on the phone. He wants me to go to the Kennedy White House this weekend.' Those are the closest words I remember. It was

³ Kay Johnson Lisle (b. 1940), née Kay Lenore Johnson, anthropologist, m. 1st 1960–2 Louis Samuel DeLuca (a Harvard graduate student), 2nd 1964–86 Edwin Stewart Dethlefsen, 3rd 1993 Peter Grim Lisle; later assistant professor of anthropology, Franklin Pierce College (1972–8), and Dean of Admissions, Colby-Sawyer College (1981–5).

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great fun. He would dictate gossip letters to people at All Souls which were very entertaining.

I attempted to arrange travel to a lecture somewhere in the Midwest. He said he hated to fly. I tried to do as he asked – though I don't think train travel was very good then. When he arrived back in Cambridge, he raged that they had picked him up in a helicopter!

A small anecdote about an amazing man.

TO VERA STERN

22 October 1965

Princeton University

Dearest Vera,

Thank you very much indeed. On the very next night Madame V. and Rostropovich appeared at Princeton in place of Miss De Los Angeles, who was indisposed in Europe. He played the piano, she sang. She appeared in the same splendid flaming red dress and sang some agreeable Tchaikovsky and some magnificent Mussorgsky (scored for a bass voice) – of all the sopranos in the world she holds a soprano which is emotionally nearer a bass than anyone else – is this an insult? Believe me, I do not wish to insult her – you think I am a little mean to her, but now our friendship is sealed by the fact that unexpectedly they saw me again – embracing – kisses – vows of eternal friendship – and I hope to see them again in New York, or at least him. Relations between them appear to me to be obscure.

But this is really a letter – forgive it being typed. If I hadn't had it typed you wouldn't have been able to read a single scribble, let alone word – to thank you for true friendship, true consideration, being so nice to us both, and in general, for being as and what you are. I must not go further for fear of awakening Isaac's no doubt never wholly dormant jealousy – at least I hope it is not dormant – no doubt jealousy is a base emotion, but its death is a sad occurrence in anyone's life surely – and to ask when you will be back again and when it is that we can meet again peacefully – after I have delivered my Columbia lectures next week, I shall be a new

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man, carefree, gay and with an unimpeded broad Russian soul. Unless you fear that this may grow to excess – which it may – please let me know here or at the Carlyle, but better here, for the Carlyle forwards very little, and usually to the wrong address.

Thank you again very much on Aline's behalf and my own.

Yours, with much love

Isaiah

Library of Congress, Isaac Stern Papers, box 14

TO MICHAEL MORAN⁴

19 September 1966

Headington House

Dear Mr Moran,

First of all I must thank you for your kind remarks about my lectures; I delivered them with great nervousness, and am glad that you liked them.

I read your piece on Coleridge with the greatest interest; I had to read it rather rapidly, but I do want to make a few comments on it if I may. Firstly, let me say that it seems to me to be one of the most perceptive pieces on Coleridge that I have ever read in English. No doubt Richards is very interesting too, and the occasional pieces by Humphrey House, but, in general, people who have written about Coleridge have either not had any philosophical insight, or not known the degree of his indebtedness to the Germans.

I wonder if you know a book by Lovejoy – the last that he ever wrote – whose name I cannot remember.⁵ It mainly deals with

⁴ (John) Michael Patrick Moran (1935–2016), assistant lecturer in philosophy, Keele, 1960–2; lecturer in philosophy and intellectual history, Sussex (where IB attended some of his lectures), 1962–88, professorial fellow, Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, 1989–93; academic adviser to Rauf Denktaş, President, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, 1991–2000.

⁵ Berlin is referring to Arthur O. Lovejoy's *The Reason, the Understanding, and Time* (Baltimore, 1961).

Schelling, to whom he is of course not very sympathetic, but whom he treats with great scruple and fairness; he gives evidence of whole pages of Schelling copied out consciously or unconsciously by Coleridge. Indeed I think there is literally nothing original in Coleridge's basic views; what is original is the application – I think this is also your view – to a theory of poetry or art in general, in the particular way that he made it, and the 'infusion' of the personality of Coleridge himself – the quality of his own vivid self-expression and the authenticity and first-handedness of the whole thing, which is very different from some of the German theorists. But idea for idea, this can all, I think, be found more or less literally both in Schlegel and Schelling. 'The Great I Am' and the Primary Imagination, in different terms, are all there. Lovejoy stresses the importance of Jacobi, now almost utterly forgotten, but in his day, according to Lovejoy, more famous than anyone other than Kant. Certainly his theories of the intuition correspond almost precisely to certain strains in Coleridge. It is the Anglican parts, or, generally, the more Christian elements in Coleridge (although there are, of course, analogues among the Germans), that often are, it seems to me, fairly original; and you are quite right to emphasise all that, and certainly the notion of the clerisy – a kind of Saint-Simonism, of a very English sort, which is peculiar and unique.

The thing I was going to emphasise particularly, however, is this: should you not perhaps go a little more into the whole division of reason versus understanding – what you quite rightly call the laudatory as opposed to the pejorative names for the two 'faculties'? I do not know where this begins, but from the beginning of roughly the second third of the eighteenth century the Germans begin to distinguish two faculties or methods or approaches or casts of mind – one analytic, scientific, tending towards the division of nature and everything else into uniform, artificial units, or pulverizing, deathly – bad; the other synthetic, creative, intuitive, organic, full of insight, delving into the essence of things, etc. etc. – good. This is certainly not Kant's division of reason and understanding; but it is there in the Schlegels, in

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Schelling, in Fichte, in Hegel, in Maistre, and in a perverted form entered into a good deal of Nazi patter; ‘analytic’ as a term of abuse – as indeed it is more or less also used by Burke – with all its aesthetic, ethical, political and theological implications, was certainly an important phase of European thought. French Catholic reactionaries by 1815 are full of it. Bergson is only the most eloquent, though not the clearest, expositor of it. I do not know of anyone else who, in English, has stated this so plainly. The difference between secondary imagination and fancy revolves around this, and so does every anti-positivist doctrine since that day.

I am off to America now for four months; but at the end of that, when I am back in England in January, I should greatly like it if we could meet and discuss these matters. For I know few people who are interested in these matters, and am always glad to meet anyone who is; especially as you have shown such extraordinary insight and, if I may say so, knowledge and imaginative understanding in this matter.

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah Berlin

TO THE EDITORS OF THE *NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS*

Published 20 June 1968

[Headington House]

Mr Miller's⁶ attempted correction of my facts is either irrelevant or mistaken. The two circles of which he speaks, and the very cool relationship between them in the early 1830s, is, perhaps, the most familiar of all pieces of knowledge in the field of nineteenth-century Russian history of ideas. There is not a textbook, however elementary, Soviet and non-Soviet, which does not dwell on this celebrated fact. But it has no bearing upon my description of Herzen towards the end of the 1830s and beginning of the next decade. Mr Miller (relying I fear on some popular exposition) says that Herzen returned to Moscow only in 1842: but this is not the case. He was, it is true, fully pardoned only in 1842, but he was allowed to live in Vladimir by 1838, from which he paid several clandestine visits to Moscow, and he returned to Moscow more or less openly in late summer of 1839. In December he went to St Petersburg and met Belinsky before the year was out; a correspondence between them began almost at once; Belinsky's notorious 'reconciliation with reality' caused a rift, ended only later in 1840. From then on there is an intimate relationship between them which remains uninterrupted despite Herzen's exile to Novgorod in 1841. By 1843 Granovsky, Turgenev and Belinsky all saw a good deal of each other: they all stayed together in Herzen's house in the country. It was during this time that the most passionate disputes about Hegel, Schiller, Schelling etc. occurred; it was the period of Granovsky's famous Moscow lectures, which marked the first great split between the Slavophiles and the 'Westerners'. It was this group of writers of which Herzen was one of the leaders. According to Strakhov, an accurate reporter of Russian ideas, Herzen's philosophical ascendancy was recognised at this time by Bakunin, Belinsky and Granovsky. Mr Miller, who

⁶ To whose letter in the same issue IB is replying.

thinks that Herzen remained in exile until 1842, naturally assumes that he could not have met Bakunin on his return, since Bakunin emigrated in 1840. I do not know whether Mr Miller reads Russian. If not, Mr E. H. Carr's excellent biography of Bakunin (pp. 79–89) could inform him that Herzen was immensely impressed by Bakunin, whom he met sometime in 1839–40, and that, whatever Herzen's opinion of Bakunin's moral character, the personal bonds between them were lifelong. Indeed, it was Herzen alone who made it possible for Bakunin to go to Germany in 1840, by lending him a sufficient sum of money; and it was Herzen who saw him off at St Petersburg, and thereafter followed his writings and career in the West with rapt attention, as his letters testify. These were the companions of Herzen's intellectually formative years, the society in which the Russian intelligentsia was born, as Mr Miller could learn if he turned to the classical work on this subject, Annenkov's *A Remarkable Decade*. The fact that Bakunin physically left it, although he remained in correspondence with its members, is neither here nor there.

There is, of course, no reason why anyone but specialists should take any interest in the identity of Herzen's intimate friends during these years: of these men, with of course Ogarev;⁷ while the names of earlier friends (the 'circle' before 1834), e.g. Sazonov, Pocheka, Noskov, fade out of Herzen's letters. But since Mr Miller challenges my thesis, I am bound to restate these facts. The fact that Belinsky or Katkov (whose family were old friends of Herzen's parents) lived in Petersburg, while Granovsky and Herzen lived in Moscow, did not prevent them from living an intense common intellectual life, sustained by correspondence and frequent visits. It is for these friends that the letters and articles from Paris after 1847 were written. These are 'the men of the forties' to whom, all his life, Herzen was conscious of belonging. So much for Mr Miller's 'glaring factual error'. I do not wish to question Mr Miller's good faith: he clearly thinks he is exposing a

⁷ This passage appears to be garbled.

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terrible howler. The facts, however, are what they are. Mr Miller's apparent ignorance of them does not alter them.

[Isaiah Berlin]

*TO ROBERT SILVERS

30 May 1969

[Headington House]

Dear Bob,

I am delighted that you have recovered and long to tell you all about Chomsky here. The reception is by no means uncritical although masses of students come. To his lecture on 'The Intellectual and Post-Industrial Society' fifteen hundred persons came in Oxford – I presided as competently as I could. It was very like an exposition in the middle 1930s, full of charm, lucidity, acrid ironies and with the most over-simplified kind of Marxism I ever heard on such an occasion. He really does think that United States foreign policy is *entirely* dictated by business interests – stated in a sophisticated form this could perhaps be made not too unpalatable; but in the form in which he gives it, it is exactly like one of the Gollancz Left Book Club pamphlets:⁸ his voice, his manner, his charm, his singularly irresistible personality that hallows it all. I am about to have a long conversation with him about the Middle East. His views I am sure will be noble, simple and tranquil, like Winckelmann's⁹ conception of classical art – but not related to verifiable empirical facts. I love him more than ever and spend time with him, but his grasp of empirical reality is not very strong. I beg you not to pass this on, but when he solemnly informed us at

⁸ Publishing venture begun by Victor Gollancz in 1936 to counter the rise of Fascism: among its cheaply produced editions, aimed at working people, was George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London, 1937).

⁹ Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68), German archaeologist and art historian, a pioneering figure in the development of art history as a discipline and in the understanding of Greek and Roman art.

dinner that the reason for the recall of George Kennan by Dulles¹⁰ was that he was too friendly to the Soviet Union – when in fact he had to return because he said that [the] Soviet regime was worse or as bad as the Nazis, at the airport in Berlin, as you recollect (a fact which Ch[omsky] seems absolutely astonished to hear) – this seemed to be not altogether untypical. Still I thought his lecture was an event. Mrs Floud did not; she liked him personally but thought that the content of his remarks reminded her of the crudest and most naive & simplified form of Marxism, which she had once followed uncritically (though, she says, never as blindly as C[homsky]) and had reacted against in due course. And indeed there is a curious mixture of subtlety and sophistication about theoretical matters, great moral charm and authority, extreme unrealism, dogmatic assurance (the philosophers here refuse to accept his doctrine, either linguistic or philosophical), sense of mission, purity of soul and almost a hatred of empirical reality (his views on the actual aspirations of Arabs, negroes, American liberals etc. are very very eccentric indeed. He is a moralist: but a terribly bad observer). If he had stuck to the proposition that intellectuals should always tell the truth, never play being politicians, never temporise or compromise, however utopian or unrealistic their ideas, that would be much better. As it is the boys love it – at least the radical ones – and everybody over twenty-seven is highly sceptical. [...]

Yours ever,
Isaiah

¹⁰ John Foster Dulles (1888–1959), lawyer and Republican statesman, Secretary of State under Eisenhower 1953–9, a strong advocate of the nuclear deterrent in the Cold War.

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Wheeler Bennett is looking forward to his article for you on the Trott book by Sykes.¹¹ He is justifiably indignant about D. Astor loony article in *Encounter*.¹²

TO JOHN SPARROW

15 July 1969

Headington House

Dear John,

You must surely know, whatever you may say, that a letter from you (I do not say ‘such as yours’, because to put a letter into a class, or any personal relationship into general terms – ‘such friendship as yours’, ‘the type of relationship that I have with you’ etc. – seems to me to destroy almost all that is of value; I need not enlarge on that – ‘such a sensibility, intelligence etc. as yours’ would easily grasp the point) gave me pleasure without end. Not only because every time one offers something in a public market one remains skinless, and peculiarly vulnerable, for a time at least, and any mention of one’s name, particularly in public, causes one to wince, criticism of course is terrible, and even praise in one’s peculiar condition is something that one tends to look in the mouth; but you must know all this yourself too well, nor do I believe those who say they never read reviews (like Virginia Woolf or Iris Murdoch). I say it because you are a very incorruptible and very fastidious critic, and friendship does not blind you to the object and its properties. You may say, and you do say, that this is not the kind of subject with which you can claim expertise; that your approval may be motivated by moral and political agreement etc.

¹¹ John Wheeler Wheeler-Bennett (1902–75), historian, official biographer of George VI; British government service, NY, 1939–45; Fellow, St Antony’s, 1950–7; Historical Adviser, Royal Archives, from 1959. He reviewed Christopher Sykes, *Tormented Loyalty: The Story of a German Aristocrat Who Defied Hitler* (New York, 1969), the US edition of *Troubled Loyalty: A Biography of Adam von Trott zu Solz* (London, 1968), in the NYRB, 11 September 1969, 37–40, under the heading ‘The Man Who Did Not Kill Hitler’.

¹² David Astor, ‘Why the Revolt against Hitler Was Ignored: On the British Reluctance to Deal with German Anti-Nazis’, *Encounter*, June 1969, 3–13.

All this may be so, but your sense of quality – of what’s what – of what comes up to standards of the finest possible differences between the fourth-rate and the third-rate, or the first-rate and that which transcends it – is as acute as any that I know (general term again! but here I think in place), and therefore this kind of sentiment from you does something – indeed a very great deal – to counteract the appalling self-depreciation and lack of confidence from which I have suffered all my life, and from which I suffer still to an extreme degree. I never think that anything that I do is *any* good – this is not an exaggeration. That is why after every lecture or talk I have ever delivered, I am possessed by a strong sense of shame. I feel the jig is up, they can see through me, it’s no good going on, these are hollow words, the whole thing is a pathetic fraud. This may be an exaggerated description, but nothing less than that quite describes the humiliation that I constantly suffer. If anything critical is said I always believe it to be absolutely true and probably an understatement, however indignant I may feel; this seems a contradiction, but it is so. If praise is uttered I feel it to be genuinely more than my due – the critic must have missed something, he must be thinking of something else, or be particularly well disposed towards me, or wish to prop me up in what he sees to be my pathetic condition, etc. I despise no one so much that harsh words from such a quarter do not affect me at all, nor respect anyone so much that I think praise from such a quarter is literally just. You may imagine therefore, that however much I may think that you have overpraised me – and I do – I am infinitely grateful for a gift which I genuinely need, if I am to go on. I have a feeling that, as David Cecil has so often said about himself, having never been in fashion, I am now distinctly out of it; that what I write about and what I say is so remote from the mood and the language, whether of professional philosophers or passionate advocates in universities, or the press, that I am thought of as a respectable relic of an obsolete period. Of course I console myself with the thought that posterity – someone, one day – will perceive in things that I write a thin rill of a civilised tradition, gone

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underground perhaps, which connects me in however small a way (and I am not suffering from false modesty in saying this) with various thinkers whom I respect. But this is true of all minor poets, writers etc., hence your words lift me, I do not know for how long, from such self-pitying contemplation to the thought that perhaps I *have* got something to say, perhaps my adversaries are not as formidable and certainly not as intellectually impressive as they seem to some – perhaps what I am doing is not useless, perhaps one ought to go on and on and do what I am doing now, which is to publish my collected works in paperbacks, one by one, instead of an impressive shelf like ALR. Hence my gratitude. That is only one reason for it. The other is wholly personal – I am absolutely delighted that you should have written me this letter and shall never, never forget it. And there may be real truth in it – a grain – two grains – I feel it may have been worth it after all.

And now the old friends and the dinner party: 5 November is no good to me for then I have a College meeting as I do on the first Wednesday of every month; 19 November I have to address an audience in Cambridge; 12 November would be excellent, but would you not consider Tuesday the 4th, 11th or 19th [sc. 18th?]?

Yours, with deep devotion, my dear old friend (this is the opposite of the usual occasion – but it is a true and apt description)

Isaiah

All Souls

TO DAVID CARVER

18 November 1969

Headington House

Dear Carver,

I am, of course, deeply touched by the great honour – great and astonishing – which the Executive Committee of the English Centre of PEN has done me in proposing that I become President during the coming year. And I apologise the more deeply for having delayed replying for so long – this is, apart from the general

chaos of my life, due to my effort to persuade myself that it would be right to accept: but the effort has not been successful thus far, although, if only for reasons of pure personal vanity, I have done my best. There are three obstacles which I feel bound to draw your attention to.

1. The usual one – of lack of time: I am now hideously divided between administrative duties in trying to help to build a new college in Oxford, and various teaching obligations as well, and come up to London more and more seldom. Whereas I think you ought to have a President who is more easily accessible and can turn up more frequently than I should be able to do to Committee meetings, receptions, lectures etc.

2. I feel that the President ought to be a real writer whom other writers recognise as being truly one of themselves, as all the former Presidents seem to me to have been – whereas I am a writer only by courtesy. My contributions to literature as such are nil – I have done very little if anything for the common reader. I feel this strongly: I should feel something of an impostor if I spoke in the name of writers, true imaginative writers, whether novelists or poets or historians.

3. At a time when so many writers are persecuted and the voice of PEN should certainly be raised in the hope, however often disappointed, that this will help the cause of humanity and freedom, it is desirable that the President of PEN should not be viewed with particular disfavour by any of the governments whose activities need to be attacked or criticised, and whose behaviour it is desired to modify. I have a suspicion that in the Soviet Union I am regarded with some disfavour – anyone who writes on Russian literature and does not adhere to, or at any rate, refrain from criticising, the official Soviet line is regarded with peculiar disapproval, not to say hostility: you know this well. Moreover I have refrained thus far from criticising the Soviet government openly for its oppression of writers and artists because I discovered that various persons, including the poet Akhmatova, as well as members of my family who remained in Russia after 1917, suffered

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probably, in part at least, because of alleged association with myself. It may be that this phase is over, or at any rate not as acute as it was: however it is a risk that I dare not take, hence my silence about some of the most outrageous acts of that wicked government. It seems to me that if I became Chairman of the British Centre it might give the Russians some apparent excuse for denouncing us as ideological enemies: they might do that in any case, but one is anxious not to provide them with any gratuitous excuse for doing it.

These are my reasons: I wish they did not exist. They seem to me pretty conclusive, but if you do not think so, please let me know, for I should like to be of help.

If it is not improper to ask, have you thought of e.g. Angus Wilson or Stephen Spender or Iris Murdoch? They seem to be worthier candidates than I am. Nevertheless I really am deeply flattered by your invitation and this will remain so whatever decision is reached.

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah Berlin

McFarlin Library Special Collections, University of Tulsa

*TO ROBERT SILVERS

2 February 1970

[Wolfson]

Dear Bob,

The Wadham agony continues.¹³ The fact that the *New Statesman* today should have said something about how Freddie's withdrawal plunged them all into chaos and how Prof. Hampshire is waiting

¹³ Wadham College was in the throes of appointing a new Warden in succession to Maurice Bowra, due to retire in August. Stuart Hampshire was a contender for the post, but the College had a long tradition of electing from within its ranks, and A. J. 'Freddie' Ayer, an honorary fellow since 1957, had been widely tipped to succeed Bowra. IB was unduly pessimistic about Hampshire's chances, perhaps because he so wished for his success.

in the wings will not improve matters.¹⁴ **all this must come from some enemy** I have an awful feeling that, in the end, the Left will vote against Stuart and this **may** seal his fate. For them he is (**& always was**) a Bloomsbury intellectual, too well dressed, too *soigné*, too refined altogether – the Right **wing** and the Old, which is much the same, will think that he will be too bored with the details of administration, which is far from true, in fact. I hope to God he gets it. I pray for this daily and hourly but do not feel optimistic. He has done better than Freddie – what mild pleasure this bleak reflection gives him I do not know, but it is insufficient.

I have read Bar-Hillel now and it is a pathetic and touching document. I understand his feelings quite well and still his positive proposals are not related to any possible reality, any more than Noam's. For example: he wants to limit immigration in order not to frighten the Arabs. Why? Everyone knows that in normal times immigration will proceed at the present pretty low rate; but if there is a pogrom in South Africa or the Argentine – let alone Russia – then, of course, these people will want to immigrate much as the French Jews want to at present – not the old **French** families but those who have filtered in during the 1930s and 1950s. Are they to be stopped? If the frontiers are to be established, this should surely be enough. Nobody in their senses supposes that 11 million Jews can immigrate: if Zionism means that it is the *duty* of every Jew to go to Israel **or be politically identified with it**, then it is, of course, **unacceptable & idiotic** – even I have denounced this at no less an establishment than Isaac Stern's Foundation in New York in the presence of Sidney¹⁵ and some exceedingly fanatical Zionists

¹⁴ In his 'London Diary' column in the *New Statesman* (30 January 1970, 143), Anthony Howard observed that the Wadham process 'seems to be taking an interminable time'; the withdrawal of A. J. Ayer, 'the most-fancied candidate', had left the field 'totally clouded and confused, though Professor Stuart Hampshire (now of Princeton) is said still to be visible as a late-runner on the outside rails'.

¹⁵ Sidney Morgenbesser (1921–2004), John Dewey Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University 1975–99; much prized by IB for his warmth and famous wit.

without being contradicted. [...] I do not believe that there are propagandists who foam at the mouth in the Messianic manner and speak of the ingathering of all the Jews into a mighty kingdom spreading over Jordan, Syria, Egypt etc. from the Euphrates and the Nile. I think he is tilting at an enormous windmill, poor man, but if he has this image before him then I do not wonder that he strikes out at it. He is, in a sense, perfectly right in saying that Zionism **as a** movement has achieved its goal and should be declared fulfilled and obsolete – **the rest, being** properly left, is natural sentiment and desire to help, etc., as in America for Ireland of the 1920s, only more so [...].

On the other hand, as far as rights of the dispossessed Arab natives are concerned, he pushed principle beyond reason. It is not a happy thing to be a minority. No doubt this shouldn't be so and everyone should be very nice to everyone else and minorities should not have to claim rights, which should be accorded to them freely, generously etc., but we know that minorities suffer in some degree everywhere. Hence to increase the number of Arabs in Israel, by whatever means, seems to me to ask for misery for both sides. Ideally, of course, bi-nationalism would be splendid, but we know that this is not to be for, at any rate, half a century, while wounds heal. The wrongs of the refugees have to be weighed against the right (and even more the desirability) of making Israel a viable community. Hence, the laying down of *any* principle – that everyone born in what is now Israel's territory should be allowed to come back; or that they should not be allowed to come back; or that all Jews have a right to come back in whatever numbers; or that only those whose mothers pass the religious test etc. should be allowed to come back; or any other generalisation whatever – seems to me likely to cut across actual concrete needs and situations and to draw blood unnecessarily. [...] **This is true of some of the old leadership** – e.g. the lady for whom you naturally care so little – **they** see their people as surrounded by implacable enemies; **or by powers** who will do nothing for them; **they** are suspicious of everyone, **and** want all their kinsfolk in every country

to stand up and be counted, and devote themselves to one task and one only: the up-building of the State of Israel against all other claims, principles, ideals. **These are** the old, eschatological, **post-Marxist** pioneers whose analogues are old Marxists, Trotskyites, Maoists etc. etc. All that will pass. **The** possibly sometimes far less **morally** attractive, but politically and even morally saner, sabras¹⁶ and other un-inflamed characters, equidistant from Begin and Deutscher (who are very similar to each other in some ways, **and** were brought up under very similar conditions and with very similar ideals) will, if they are allowed to survive at all, come to terms with the Arabs; **otherwise there will be awful slaughter**. Bar Hillel's appeal to the **Great Powers** to impose a solution is **very** German again. He is obviously a very decent, upright man but the imposition of any kind of rectilinear schema upon that tangled growth would be a terrible vivisection. [...]

In the meanwhile, I suffer for Stuart: an unnecessary number of wounds – as if some number were necessary – have been inflicted upon him lately and by his own country, too. There is, perhaps, something in being a cosmopolitan after all.

Yours ever,
 [Isaiah]

¹⁶ Hebrew term applied to Jews born in Israel.

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TO HAYME MARANTZ

28 May 1970

Wolfson College

Dear Mr Marantz,

Thank you very much for your letter of 22 May. I am glad that you think that the principle of the incompatibility of values clears up Machiavelli's position. I do, indeed, think so too: and did about five years ago read a paper to this effect which was mimeographed (to the British Political Studies Association, which met in Oxford)¹⁷ and propose to send this paper, amended (I have by now spoken to a good many universities in this sense in public lectures), to a symposium on Machiavelli to be published under the auspices of a Harvard Foundation in Florence.¹⁸ There I work out the very positions that you have, unaided, reached in the course of your short, but very penetrating, note to me. If I can lay my hand on my original mimeographed sheet, I will send it to you. My thesis is indeed that Machiavelli was virtually the first person to declare (without doing so explicitly) that there were two incompatible moralities – the Christian and what he represented as the Graeco-Roman – and that not only rulers, but presumably citizens too, had to choose between them, for they were conceptually incompatible, not merely unrealisable [together] in practice. He thought, as you know, that one could restore the past – that the Roman republic could be restored with enough will, energy, resources. As for whether a Christian way of life could be realised, he, it seems to me, neither knew nor cared, but, I suspect, thought this quite

¹⁷ IB's paper was read on 26 March 1963 at the conference of the Political Studies Association held at Exeter College, Oxford, on 25–7 March. The date of 1953 that he assigned to it when it was first published, in a volume marking the 500th anniversary of Machiavelli's birth – as 'The Originality of Machiavelli': Myron P. Gilmore (ed.), *Studies on Machiavelli* (Florence, 1972), 149–206 – is an error. The essay is reprinted with many corrections in AC.

¹⁸ Villa I Tatti, The Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, of which Gilmore (previous note) was Director 1964–73.

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impractical, given human nature as it must unalterably be. So my conclusion was that Croce was wrong in saying that Machiavelli divided politics from morals, for what he divided was one moral world from another – not at all the same thing. That this is the application of what you are kind enough to call my insight to the problem of *The Prince* and the *Discourses* I fully realised when I wrote the paper. I seem to myself to be always saying the same thing.

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah Berlin

Hayme Marantz

*TO ROBERT SILVERS

29 May 1970

[Wolfson College]

Dear Bob,

I feel that some kind of report is owing to you by this time. [...] Sir Maurice telephoned to me, saying, ‘Bad news. Mrs Stone, wife of Lawrence Stone, told Stuart that he was not wanted in Wadham and spread stories about the hostile reception that is waiting for him.’ Absolute nonsense. We are all most eager. The only person who is hostile is Stone’s friend Pat Thompson,¹⁹ who is mad, enraged, determined to make trouble. I hope Stuart believes none of this. I have told Thompson what I think of him. He made a scene, etc. [...] One man can do a lot of harm and inflict a lot of wounds, and this, I fear, may happen. However, in the end, Stuart’s beauty of character will (I know this to be an incontrovertible truth) quell opposition. Still, it was not entirely without a certain mild maliciousness – I will not say pleasure, but interest – that Sir Maurice communicated this horrid intelligence to me. It is, on the whole, best that you not know it, otherwise it will be thought a kind of spreading story; Stuart will think there is more in this than

¹⁹ Arthur Frederick (‘Pat’) Thompson (1920–2009), Fellow and history Tutor, Wadham, 1947–87.

meets the eye; Renée will think that there is a campaign, etc., none of which is true. But it is as I thought about Stone – happy in Princeton he may be, and it may not be his fault so much as his awful wife’s, but a certain envy grips all academics at a certain stage of their life, particularly those who, having failed in a given place, observe others succeeding in what they regard as their own particular preserve. None of this is news.

Secondly, Cal: I think all is well. He began by rather disliking Sparrow, and still dislikes All Souls, the dinner jackets on Saturdays, the fact that it is all too much like school, too much silly formality and general nonsense. But I am sure he is right **to take** the job at Essex which will only occupy him two days a week, otherwise he can live peacefully in London, which is surely the best thing for him now. He would have gone to absolute pieces in New York, I am sure. His lecture to the audience in Oxford under my almost non-existent auspices was a wild success – about 700 persons came, more than for Chomsky, fewer only than, I think, to Boulez: he was not displeased; he read his verse, answered questions. I said that he literally needed no introduction and simply said ‘Mr Robert Lowell’. I meant this as a compliment. However, I saw that Cal was perhaps not entirely pleased: he made a slight reference to the fact that usually one can start off by making play of the Chairman’s remarks in introducing the speaker, but in this case it was, alas, literally impossible to do so. From this I detected a certain minute degree of disappointment. So I woke up to my obligations and in closing the lecture paid him appropriate compliments. Well received. After that he went to a party at our house, at which he met all kinds of revolutionary students, which I think he enjoyed. [...]

In my next instalment I will discuss Noam, and the new committee for Arab–Jewish understanding. It is thoroughly to be approved of and **also** seems to me a grave mistake. Now I must see my next visitor, in fact my next three visitors who are sweltering in my poor secretary’s room next door.

Yours ever,

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[Isaiah]

TO ROBERT SILVERS

1 September [1971] [*manuscript*]

Paraggi

Dear Bob,

Thank you for everything: letters, proofs²⁰ (can you *really* want to print it *all*? What will your readers say! I can just hear some of them exclaiming, & justly, I fear, that there is a limit to learned logorrhoea – I've corrected *very* little – Stuart has been over it & dissipated it a tiny bit too; at the moment he is here, so are Marietta & Roy Jenkins; R.J. is amiable & civilized & a little cagey: but is he is called a very good, undemanding, unpompous guest. Marietta does, I suspect, pine for a little more social life than we provide: Stuart & Malia are very funny together: Malia is excited by Stuart's left wing sentiments, Stuart suitably shocked by Malia's religion & academic conservatism. They get on: & Sparrow will be here at any moment – & then Gaby Cohen from Israel, & then Cyprus & so it goes on. I *wish* you came to Cyprus: it will be even odder than the Diaghilev–Stravinsky memorial service which we went to – by the anti-Stravinskian black lifewriter: Bob Craft has written me two very sad & touching letters – he must *not* know that we ever in the same motoscafo as the hated Lifar. I hear you read an essay on Fathers & Sons by Turgenev's editor & later enemy, Mikhail Katkov, written in about 1862: very nasty & intelligent: his chief points being that Bazarov & the nihilists, so far from attacking rhetoric, phrases, pretty words, embellished life – in the name of the bleak stern truth, science, ruthless realism, harsh candour, are themselves phrase-mongers: what they peddle is *not* science – there *are* no real students [of] science in Russia – but popular science

²⁰ Of 'The Question of Machiavelli', *New York Review of Books*, 4 November 1971, 20–32; repr. of part of 'The Originality of Machiavelli', published in Myron P. Gilmore (ed.), *Studies on Machiavelli* (Florence, 1972: Sansoni), 149–206, and in AC and PSM.

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invoking trash – Büchner, Moleschott, Vogt: not chemistry or physics, but tracts which misuse popular scientific slogans for social & political radicalism: & the nihilism is more anti-intellectual revolt against true knowledge, reason etc – & has no positive programme, only crude barbarous cries against civilization, decency etc – partly due to the protestors being the children of clergymen – priests – an ignorant degenerate *caste*, with no vocation, isolated from life & suffocating its progeny. Reactionary & interesting stuff – must be best right wing criticism of the shy liberalism of the middle roaders: Turgenev's terror of the young, exaggerated fear of being unfair to them is itself represented as leading to a distortion of the truth which a braver & more independent rationalist would state less tremulously. Malia drank it all up. *When* do we meet? I am very glad you are in love. It is a heavenly condition, whatever its difficulties & agonies – & when it ceases the owl of Athena really does come down, & life writes its grey on grey, as old Georg Hegel (as Italians call him) once said –

Love

Isaiah

PS [...] Cd you send my corrected proofs (with the changes marked) photostated, to Gilmore in Florence? or to his secretary? please. IB

New York Public Library

TO JOHN HABAKKUK

12 May 1974

[Headington House]

Dear Mr Vice-Chancellor,

May I inform you that I intend to retire from my post as President of Wolfson College in the course of the academic year 1974–5, most probably before the beginning of Trinity Term 1975, but in any case before the beginning of Michaelmas Term of that year. This decision has been made known to the Governing Body

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of the College, and I understand that it proposes shortly to submit the name of the person whom it would wish to recommend as my successor for the consideration, in the first instance, of the Trustees of Wolfson College, and, if approved by them, to the Hebdomadal Council for its consideration. The Vice-Gerent of the College will doubtless be in communication with yourself on this matter in due course.

Yours sincerely,
[Isaiah Berlin]

PS [to cc to John Sparrow] My successor will in fact, I believe, wish to enter upon his duties during the Easter vacation of 1975. I have been offered the Presidency of the British Academy: as you know, I have only one further ambition in my uneventful life, and if that helps towards realising it, why, then, I suppose I should not hesitate: though it is by no means a sinecure, and rough waters from the Left are, I gather, expected ... My dear old friend, what do you advise me to do? I have never failed to take your advice, save once, and even then I thought you were perfectly right but I had no real choice in the matter (if you are curious enough to know to what it is I am referring, ask me at our next meeting – I shall have my answer ready).

Do advise me,
I.B.

All Souls

In January 1975 an exchange took place with Bryan Magee about his and IB's strongly opposed views on Israel.

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TO BRYAN MAGEE

7 January 1975

Headington House

Dear Bryan,

Your p.c.²¹ to hand. I myself am by now totally confused about your position on Israel. Are your alternatives ‘secular state’, i.e. dissolution, versus extinction? – the last merely being a more savage form of the former. Or is Resolution 242²² the alternative? I have talked to some tough doves in Israel, who seemed to me entirely reasonable and very moderate indeed. But the issue of the Union²³ is surely whether Israel should commit suicide or not? The Union *did*, I am told, invite one or two notoriously doveish Israelis here to speak, but they refused, I think rightly, to discuss the question of whether it would be best for Israel to disappear. I have no idea who the main speakers are. You know what happened in Cambridge last term on this?

Would you be free to have a drink on 16 January at, say, 6 p.m., at the Athenaeum or the Ritz, whichever you prefer?

Yours sincerely,

Isaiah

Magee responded on 10 January:

My dear Isaiah,

My position on Israel is the same as it always was. I can oversimplify it in four sentences. Sentence one: Although the creation of Israel was a great wrong against the Arabs, and ought not to have happened, there is no practically acceptable way in which it can now be undone. Sentence two: The most desirable thing, therefore, is that

²¹ Not found.

²² United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, adopted 22 November 1967 after the Six-Day War, called for Israel’s withdrawal from the occupied territories.

²³ Presumably the Oxford Union, where it sounds as if BM had been invited to speak on this topic.

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the Arabs should accept the continued existence of Israel. Sentence three: The fact has to be faced, however, that this is to ask more than most human beings generally, and Arabs in particular, find tolerable, and therefore and would have to be balanced by massive concessions to the Arabs by Israel, bigger than anything they have yet been prepared to contemplate. Sentence four: Only the kind of deal outlined in my sentences two and three, involving as it does huge sacrifices by both sides, can ensure both the survival of Israel and the attainment of peace in the Middle East.

Carrying on from my sentence four, I think that only an approach which sees the Arab point of view and genuinely sympathises with it can secure their acceptance of Israel's existence – which is what I meant when I said that my kind of pro-Arab is objectively Israel's best friend.

I'd love to have drink with you at the Athenaeum at 6 p.m. on Thursday 16 January. If the argument between us becomes too violent, no doubt they will throw us out.

Yours sincerely,
Bryan

TO BRYAN MAGEE

15 January 1975

Headington House

Dear Bryan,

Thank you for your letter. I do not believe your position to be founded on rational grounds, but then perhaps Dr Popper is right after all and no value judgements can in principle be so. But if you really believe that the United Nations committed a grave crime in 1948, and that, after all that had happened between 1933 and 1945, it was the lesser evil to leave the Jews in Palestine to the mercies of the Arabs (for this was the only feasible alternative – and was, in fact, the one adopted), which would have deprived Israel of the only claim to legitimacy that it could possibly possess – then, I think, you should change your position on [the?] racing card [*siz*], and explain that you support the position of the more moderate followers of Arafat. Otherwise you will ensure that the gap between you and any other opponents of the motion will be so

wide as to create inevitable confusion in their ranks – and that is something that they have a right to protect themselves from. In short, I shall not argue about your position, from which I am sure that you cannot be shifted by perception of either facts or the moral consequences of the policy you advocate. But I do think that your allies could well exclaim ‘Non tali auxilio, non defensoribus istis’²⁴ – the least you can do is to warn them of the line you are likely to take – if you told this to the other side too, they may not bother to speak, since I have no doubt whatever that you could put their case, at least three-quarters of it, far more persuasively – I mean convincingly and ably and sincerely, and without the emotional claptrap which on some occasions both sides are apt to employ.

All foreign rule is hateful. But do you feel similar emotions about Poles in Germany, the Czechs in German Bohemia, the Iraqis in Kurdistan, the Poles in Danzig, etc.? Do you think that the millions of displaced persons of 1945–6 should or could go back to their original homes? But there – I promised not to argue. At the Athenaeum we must discuss why it is that even the universities in England look so contemptuously upon the arts and honour them so seldom, and when they do, so capriciously (e.g. Oxford this year).

Yours,
Isaiah

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²⁴ Vergil, *Aeneid* 2. 521. The beginning of the next line, ‘tempus eget’, is understood: ‘The occasion does not need help of that kind or defenders such as those.’