VINTAGE

PATRICK WHITE
LETTERS

DAVID MARR

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About the Book

From the time when he was a little boy, Patrick White wrote letters – brilliant, gossipy, funny, angry, heartfelt letters. When he died in 1990 at the age of 78, between 2,500 and 3,000 of them survived, scattered – and often treasured – all over the world. In the course of producing his much-admired biography of White, David Marr tracked down most of them. Now, with sensitivity and skill, he has assembled a rich selection from the letters to present a fascinating portrait of White in his uninhibited words – as a writer, as a friend (or enemy), as a man deeply and painfully engaged with his world.

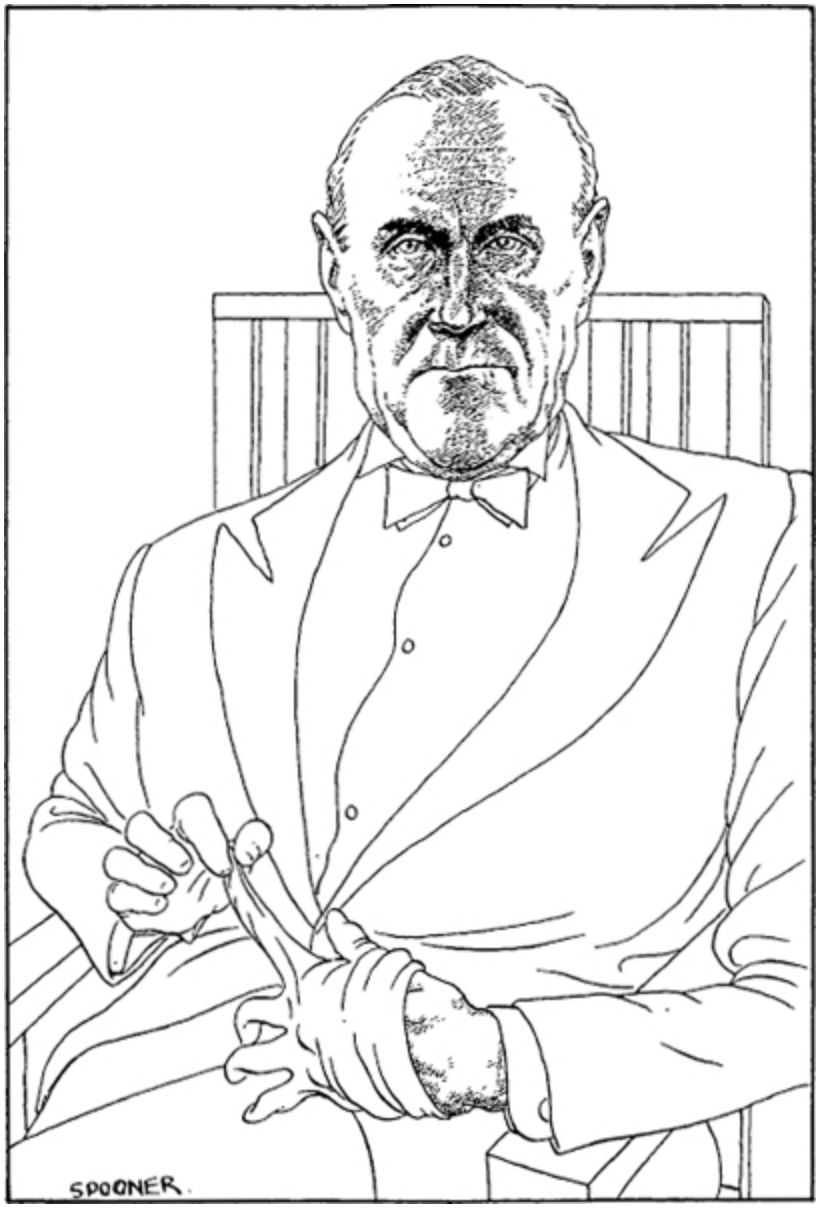
About the Author

David Marr grew up in Sydney and trained as a lawyer before becoming a journalist, broadcaster and writer. He is the author of three books; his biography of Patrick White won a number of literary prizes. Marr has produced several notable television documentary reports for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and is now presenter of ABC Radio National’s ‘Arts Today’.

Also by David Marr

Barwick
The Ivanov Trail
Patrick White: A Life

Telly; but I didn't come to that.
When I've finished the book I'm writing, probably about this time next year I think we'll have to try to uproot ourselves again. I want to go to Central Europe in connection with something I have in mind for another book. But travel is an awful effort, I mean starting off, and the worst part is finding somebody to look after the house.
Our ambassador to Peking was here the other day & tried to tempt us to go to China, which I'd like to do of course, but how to find the time for it? There are two more books I want to write after I have finished this one. After those I expect I shall be starting my senility, & certainly too decrepit to wander about China.
Hope all your family are well
Love Patrick


SPOONER.

To
Peggy Garland
who showed me the first bundle
and said,
‘You may be interested.’

PATRICK WHITE
LETTERS

Edited by David Marr

JONATHAN CAPE
LONDON

SECOND LADY: Are there no letters? There’s nothink I like better than a read of a good letter. Look and see, Mrs Goosgog, if you can’t find me a letter. I’m inclined to feel melancholy at this hour of night.

The Ham Funeral

Note

THESE ARE the letters of a great artist speaking his mind, a wise man who could be stubbornly wrong. Occasionally I have given other versions of events, reported dissenting views and corrected facts, but I have not tried to adjudicate all the rows or balance every one of White's sharp but sometimes partial judgements. My aim in editing the letters is to allow the man to speak, as much as possible, for himself.

I have made no changes to White's grammar and punctuation and I have preserved most of his eccentricities, but I felt it necessary to standardise the often confusing ways he cites the names of books, ships, films, plays, and so on, just as I have reduced to order his erratic transliterations of Greek placenames.

For this book to sustain a narrative of White's life and opinions I have made cuts to most of the 600 or so letters here. So … indicates a cut made by me, and – – for White's own rare use of … If cuts have been made to the top of a letter there is no salutation, and if to the bottom there is no signature.

The number of White's correspondents is large and to help make sense of this crowd there is a guide, 'The Cast of Correspondents'.

D.E.M.
6 August 1994

ONE

Finding his Feet

May 1912 – October 1939

ALMOST AS SOON AS he could hold a pencil Patrick White was writing letters. He scrawled them at his mother's direction to Whites and Withycombes in the bush and cousins far away in England. The habit of keeping in touch by letter, of asking and thanking in writing, was drummed into the little boy early and stayed with him for life. He was only six when he wrote,

LULWORTH, DECEMBER 1918
TO FATHER XMAS
Dear Father Xmas.
Will yoy please bring me
a pistol, a mouth organ
a violin
a butterfly net
Robinson Cruso
History of Australia
Some marbles,
a little mouse what runs
across the room
I hope you do not
think I am too greedy
but I want the
things badly
your loving
Paddy.

HE WAS THE CHILD of a famous family in Australia. For nearly a century, the Whites had amassed fine grazing land in New South Wales. They survived droughts, rode booms and prospered in busts. By the end of the First World War the family was at the height of its wealth and influence. The boy's father Victor – known to everyone as Dick – was one of four brothers in partnership at Belltrees, over 100,000 acres of gentle country on the upper reaches of the Hunter River. After twenty years in the valley Dick left to marry his cousin Ruth Withycombe and they spent a long honeymoon in Europe. Their son, Patrick Victor Martindale White, was born in London in an apartment overlooking Hyde Park on 28 May 1912.

The family returned a few months later and settled in Sydney. It was Ruth's idea to stay in town for she was not cut to the pattern of plain White wives, happy to spend the rest of their days in the bush. Ruth was determined not to be bored. She set up an elegant house overlooking Rushcutters Bay. Here at Lulworth the boy's sister Suzanne was born in 1915. With her came a new nurse, Lizzie Clark, a tiny, no-nonsense woman not quite five feet tall, with sharp eyes and a tough Scots accent. She was determined her *bairns* would be good. The boy struggled all his life with the plain ideals Lizzie pitted against his mother's more opulent ambitions.

Ruth insisted Paddy aim high above the slovenly standards of Australia. He was forbidden to speak the larrikin drawl of the streets round Lulworth or the Dublin slang of his mother's kitchen. 'Nora Barnacle,' he later remarked, 'could have been one of the stream of Irish maids that flowed through our house.' He was taught the piano (a failure) and French conversation. He was drilled to lift his cap, shake hands and look adults in the eye. And at the age of four or five he was introduced to the art of writing letters. Ruth knew what weapons these could be in the social

armoury of their class. Hers were good. Years later Manoly Lascaris read them as they arrived each week from London: ‘She knew the language.’

The Whites’ links with the bush were not severed. Dick disappeared every month to help his brothers for a few days at Belltrees. They all took for granted that Paddy would one day follow them onto the land, taking a share of their considerable acres. A great chunk of Belltrees was the boy’s birthright and always part of his imagination.

EARLY 1919

TO THE FAIRIES

Dear Fairies would you give me a book I dont mind what kind it is can I have it on my birthday it is on the 28 of May. I hope you will have a nice danse to night. I expose you have tea on the toad stools at night. Do you live in the flowers. Would you please make it rain in the country soon it is very dry up there the sheep and cattle are dieing. And would make the influenza better I wish you would with love from

Paddy

AFTER FAMILY EXPEDITIONS TO Belltrees the boy wrote to thank his uncle Henry who for forty years ruled the place with a kind of genius. This remarkable man admired young Paddy who came to take after him in many ways, not least in choosing to deal with the world by post. Buried in the old man’s immense correspondence with brothers and cousins, solicitors, bishops, aldermen, agents, trainers, book sellers, ornithologists and stamp collectors were scraps of praise for his clever nephew. ‘A remarkably well written and expressed letter has come from Paddy …’

Asthma, the curse of both Whites and Withycombes, had been with the boy from birth. Mountain air was prescribed for his health when he was nine and the Whites bought a cottage at Mount Wilson, a hill station in wild country behind Sydney. Around a handful of English gardens on the summit

of the mountain lay a wilderness of forests, deep ravines and waterfalls. This was paradise for the boy. His first piece published was a letter about the mountain written to ‘The President of the League of Friendship’ on the children’s page of the Sydney *Sunday Times* in January 1922. White signed himself with the pseudonym ‘Red Admiral’ after his favourite butterfly. In spring he wrote again,

PUBLISHED 22.x.22
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE LEAGUE OF FRIENDSHIP
This time I am going to tell you about a moonlight picnic at Mount Wilson. We started off at about 7 o’clock and walked for about a mile till we reached the picnicking spot. A fire was built and we cooked chops and sausages over the blaze. The waterfall nearby looked like silver in the moonlight, while the tree ferns made weird noises as they swayed to and fro in the breeze. The hanging vines glistened with the spray showered upon them from the waterfall, and the grass rustled as if a snake army was creeping along in its depths. We did not return from this beautiful picnic till quite late, and then I was very sorry to go.

RUTH WAVED THE RED Admiral letters like a flag above her boy’s head.
Here was evidence of genius: only ten and already published. However much he denied the truth in later life, cringing at the memory of his mother’s enthusiasm, it was always Ruth’s ambition that he would write.

For the sake of his lungs the boy was sent to school on the highlands south of Sydney. At Tudor House pupils were made to scratch a letter home every Sunday night. New boys were broken in by the headmaster who quizzed them gently on the doings of the week and drafted notes in pencil for them to copy in ink. The week was not over, not entirely lived, until some version of its small events had been

written down: pony rides along the creek, eggs collected, rabbits trapped and cooked over fires in the bush. From Tudor House Paddy White wrote to both Ruth and Lizzie – ‘my real mother,’ he later called her – and continued writing for decades until senility claimed the women.

Ruth and Dick took the boy to England at the age of thirteen and left him there in boarding school. The next four years marked him for life. Cheltenham Grammar fashioned his sexuality, set fast his grim view of the human race and made him, at least in his own eyes, a foreigner everywhere, part-English and part-Australian, never entirely at ease. Ruth’s and Dick’s last act before leaving London was to buy the boy a typewriter. Fifty years later he recalled, ‘Somebody showed me roughly what to do behind the counter at Harrods.’[fn1] Now his letters home were a lifeline to the lost world of his childhood. With them he sent the sad, clever verse which Ruth had printed for the family in 1930, bound with a little silk ribbon and stamped *Thirteen Poems*.

In these lonely years, White found a few friends for life. Ronald Waterall was a flamboyant boy obsessed with the stage. Together they plotted revues, sent fan mail to actresses and haunted the West End together on holidays. Later Waterall went into the theatre – taking the name Ronald Waters – but abandoned the stage after the war to become an actors’ agent in London.

One holiday weekend in 1928 White met his three Withycombe cousins: Betty the bluestocking working at the Clarendon Press; Peggy the sculptor just back from Cape Town; and the youngest of the three sisters, Joyce the painter still training at the Slade. Of these Betty had the most immediate impact on White. She became both sister and mentor, the first person to take his intellectual education in hand. The boy became her protégé, almost her

possession. From the start there were difficulties in this demanding relationship.

The young man returned to Australia in early 1930 for the next stage of his education. He was to work as a jackeroo, a kind of gentleman apprentice-grazier, to see if he was suited for life on the land. Once that was settled one way or another he would return to England to take a degree at Cambridge. He found himself in a bare valley on the edge of the Snowy Mountains. Here, by lamplight in a hut on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River he wrote his first (unpublished) novels. To help relieve the boredom of his existence in the bush Ronald Waters found him a London pen friend: Jean Scott Rogers, another stagestruck young writer. They were to correspond for life.

BOLARO, 16.iii.31
TO JEAN SCOTT ROGERS
Dear Jean,
By your letter I feel sure that you are not the kind of person to object to my presumption in calling you by your Christian name. Even if you are – secretly – what's done can't be undone. But what kind of a person are you really? Are you a sport in a plaid skirt; or a Bohemian in spectacles and a Spanish hat; or a seductive siren with a willowy waist and magnetic eyes; or the taffeta ingénue; or the leafy nymph; or – but that could go on till the end of time. The next problem is: what are we going to talk about, for I'm sure you don't want to hear about sheep (neither do I, for that matter); and geographical situations bore you stiff; and weather charts finally exterminate. I suppose then, there's nothing left but your collaborator.[fn2] He's certainly an extraordinary person, the only one with whom I have ever been able to get on, and that, I think, because we are so rude to each other that we have to. Once in the dim and distant past, I collaborated with him myself. What a memory! It was a farcical comedy – always an apologetic

appellation – and it rejoiced in the title of ‘Amorous Wives.’ Husbands, wives, friends, and lovers popped in and out of doors and hid behind curtains; you know the type? It generally has a four night run nowadays. Then there was ‘The Madonna of the Forest’ (by myself this time) a romantic comedy in four acts, though the fourth was never reached. The action took place in a castle in the forest with Isabel Jeans[fn3] traipsing up and down miles of staircase in search of true luv. I wonder if I shall ever finish a play, and have it produced, which is more to the point. Perhaps I shall be over to see the production of The play after all, as I may sail in August from this God-forsaken land, where everyone is gradually growing madder and madder. I am on the point of launching forth upon the subject of political science, but have no fear; I don’t know enough about it, I’m much too unpractical for that. I like to plan highly impossible things and, well – if they don’t come off there are always other highly impossible things to plan and think about. That there are so many new things to think about, so many new experiments to make, is the only thing which makes life possible. Sometimes I get fed up to the teeth here in the country, where the type of Australian one encounters is the most uninspiring, unintelligent, deadening specimen to be found on earth. Although you will meet many charming people here, I detest the average Australian, who is little more than a cheap imitation of the American. There is quite a lot of amusement to be found in life in Sydney, but it is a rattling, jangling affair from mom till night. It makes one long for London, and the smooth, gliding feeling which it has. I haven’t been to a show for ages, not a real show with professional West-End finish. The only serious work is done by amateur theatres where you can see O’Neill, Chekov, Strindberg, and other good stuff credibly acted. But they haven’t the time, nor the money, nor the public, to do anything on a large scale. The professional stage is peopled

by provincial companies in musical comedy and American farce, things which induce one to stay at home. And of course there are the talkies! Sumptuous cinemas of gilt and stucco; Spanish; Italian; Tudor; all nightmares of garishness and bad taste. I believe you read a lot, don't you? Lately I haven't had time as I am trying to scribble something myself, but usually I do nothing else. At odd moments during the week I have been struggling with the beginning of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* by Henry Handel Richardson. The dust-jacket is smothered in eulogies for which, so far, I can't find any reason. The descriptive passages are excellent but the characters and dialogue as crude as can be. You must read *Buddenbrooks* by Thomas Mann, if you haven't, and some Katherine Mansfield, about whom I can't say enough. Before I develop into a library list, pure and simple, I think I shall stop, and wish you all the usual salutary things. Hurry up and finish the play. If I can't see it, I shall itch to read the notices.

Yours sincerely,
Paddy White.

THE DEPRESSION HAD LEFT the Whites unexpectedly short of cash and the young man had to wait another year to make good his escape to Cambridge. After Bolaro he jackerooed briefly for his aunt and uncle, Clem and Mag Withycombe, at Walgett on the edge of the desert. Then he retreated to Mount Wilson to spend a hard winter writing a third novel, Finding Heaven, which was packed in his trunk when the *Niagara* sailed from Sydney with him on board in August 1932. He expected never to return.

At Cambridge he studied French and German, soon abandoning the lectures to read his own way through the syllabus. To perfect his German, he went often to Hannover where he found a home in the Holzgraben flat of the Oertel family. He was secretly writing poetry which again went

home to his proud mother. Two poems, ‘The Ploughman’ and ‘Meeting Again’, he submitted to the *London Mercury*.

KING’S COLLEGE, 13.v.34
TO JEAN SCOTT ROGERS
May I accept the invitation? But I tell you both beforehand that I am very bad at parties, so that you must know what to expect if I venture to appear. At the moment I am suffering last-week tortures before my German exam, which starts on the 22nd and lasts two days. I go on revising and revising and as a result am about as bright as a shell-piece under a glass bell. But I expect, and hope that getting the exam over will clear the air. The other day I had a very reassuring surprise: in shape of the proof of two poems I had sent to the *London Mercury* and which I had long believed to be in their waste-paper basket as I had heard nothing more. If they print them, I suppose they will appear in the next number, though I feel that something must go wrong in between and that they will decide to cut them out at the last moment. But at least I have never got so far as seeing the proof before – and it is very exciting.

THEIR PUBLICATION IN JUNE 1934 encouraged Ruth and Dick in an expensive scheme to promote their son's work in Sydney. They became principal shareholders in the local publishing house of P. R. (Inky) Stephensen. The deal seems to have been that Stephensen would publish a volume of Patrick White's poetry, and perhaps the novel Finding Heaven which the author had tried and failed to have published in England, in return for the Whites' investment of £300.

KING'S COLLEGE, 21.x.34
TO P. R. STEPHENSEN

As regards Finding Heaven, I have not looked at it for some time and so could not say definitely whether it is possible to revise the book. Perhaps you could give me some idea of what you consider its greatest weaknesses. But I am really uncertain whether I could bring myself to revise it after all this time. I wrote it in a frame of mind with which I cannot altogether sympathise to-day.

To return to the poems: would it be possible to place a few copies somewhere in London after their publication? I might be able to get a sale for these. And a few cards for circulation might be a help.

Hoping the new poems may be included and that you will give me a more detailed opinion of Finding Heaven –

Yours faithfully,

Patrick White.

STEPHENSEN'S AFFAIRS WERE IN chaos. In early 1935 he went into liquidation; Ruth and Dick found a printer to finish the job and *The Ploughman and Other Poems* appeared a few months later. It was reviewed by the Sydney press with more goodwill than enthusiasm.

The Whites now gathered in London to settle the question of their son's career. Patrick – for he had decided he was no longer Paddy – wanted to stay in London rather than return to take up his Belltrees inheritance. Ruth and Dick

acquiesced; Dick promised an allowance of £400 a year and their son settled down in a couple of rooms in Ebury Street to become a West End playwright.

After a barren year writing plays no managements wanted, White met the Australian painter Roy de Maistre who became his lover and mentor. The painter loathed the theatre and encouraged the young man to rework one of his jackaroo novels. This became *Happy Valley*, set in the harsh landscape of Bolaro where White had worked five years before. Escape is the common dream of most of the valley's inhabitants: adulterers, asthmatics, graziers (in the Furlows of Glen Marsh, White produced the first and perhaps best portrait of his parents), stockmen and Chinese. A murder brings the cast to its senses; some make an escape, but it is not to freedom. The prose was adventurous: 'I was still drunk with the techniques of writing … and had gone up that cul de sac the stream of consciousness.'[fn4]

In the summer of 1937 White took the manuscript to the resort of St Jean-de-Luz on the Atlantic coast of France. There he met and began an affair with a Spanish diplomat, José Ruiz de Arana y Bauer, Viscount Mamblas – known as Pepe Mamblas. The diplomat, a small man with perfect manners who was remembered for beautiful dinners and his devotion to the Ballet Russe, had served in London in the 1920s. He adored royalty. When Mamblas met White he was 44, living in Biarritz and making forays into Spain on business for Franco. White returned to London at the end of summer.

91 Ebury Street, 2.xii.37
TO PEPE MAMBLAS
My dearest Pepe,
It was very sweet of you to send me the Rilke letters, which I shall enjoy reading again. For I did read them some time ago, in German – when I was beginning that language, and so I missed a great deal.

You sounded depressed, and I can understand it. But surely, the way things are turning, it can't go on for many more months?[fn5]

I have been in a state of turmoil myself the last couple of days. A cable came yesterday morning to say that my father had just died. Even though he has had a lot of illness lately one was not quite prepared for it. And since that I have been trying to readjust myself to this new situation and am feeling very tired and restless. I find I have the greatest difficulty in making myself sit down in one place for more than half-an-hour on end, which is an unusual state of affairs for me.

I think it would be much easier if I could feel what I ought to, and what other people are expecting me to feel. You are so lucky there, Pepe, with your own family. But now more than ever I realise what little connexion there always was between my father and me.

I am also faced with the problem of whether to go out to Australia or not. If my mother wants me I suppose I shall have to. And then there will also be business to attend to. But I do feel that to leave this side of the world just as I am getting my toe inside the door, would be to throw up all the progress made in the last two years. However, I shall not be able to receive a letter from my mother for another fortnight and needn't think about taking definite steps until I see how the land lies. Anyway, I expect she and my sister will come over here soon for a trip, and perhaps to stay permanently.

I had a very good burst of literary energy at the beginning of the week, which I fear has waned before it should have, though I managed to finish a short story, with which I am still pleased before all this started to happen. It's a pity, because I had a couple of others planned out and was going to start on them right away. Now I don't know when I shall. One of them seems to have built itself round your descriptions of Percy – of course nothing like – these things

never are – but he acts as a starting point. I want to make this a portrait of a rather awful old Edwardian who has spent his life beautifully (according to his own standards) and whose soul is Stopped and Bought in sordid circumstances in the middle of Brompton Road.[fn6]

I can't write you any more to-night. It seems such a long time since I saw you, and if I go out to Australia, when will it be again?! That is too vast to bear thinking about.

Much love,

P.

91 Ebury Street, 4.i.38

TO PEPE MAMBLAS

This New Year's Eve I decided to go off by myself and see some London Life. I fear it wasn't more than a depressing evening, but I suppose I asked for that by drinking too much draught beer in Charlotte Street. Everyone else appeared to be doing the same. There were bursting faces everywhere, and lots of mechanical music, and singing, and embracing. But I couldn't get rid of the impression that I was looking at it all through the wrong end of the telescope. In Shaftesbury Avenue an all-in wrestler tacked himself on and took a lot of getting rid of. Finally I lost him in a seething Piccadilly Circus, with everyone shouting, clambering on the roofs of taxis and buses, and even lifting up cars and carrying them along bodily. I got home intact and very sleepy but with my head in such a whirl that I might still have been in the thick of things.

The Spanish is going well and I <u>can</u> read with a lot of pleasure. At the moment I am reading the *Novelas Ejemplares* of Cervantes, and I manage to follow the general trend of things without any difficulty. But poetry needs a bit of working out – I should not have started *La Vida es* Sueño,[fn7] for instance, so soon. But you might suggest some <u>modern prose</u> some time. I am quite able to tackle that, and

I find the only way I can get hold of a language is by reading and reading until it fills itself in.

Well, I have so many Christmas letters – you know the sort of thing – so I must leave you. You must be excited about the turning of the tables at Teruel.[fn8] Perhaps that is an omen for the year.

Much love,

P.

HE WAS ALSO WRITING revue sketches. 'Peter Plover's Party', a monologue for a chatterbox in the manner of Ronald Waters, was bought by the Shakespearian critic and director of revue Herbert Farjeon for his show *Nine Sharp* at the Little Theatre.

91 EBURY STREET, 27.i.38

TO PEPE MAMBLAS

My dear Pepe,

It was good to get your last letter and hear that you were well, but I don't like the idea of your plunging into all those air-raids. Is it Salamanca this time? I hope you'll let me know you're safe and sound again.

I am enclosing two cuttings about *Nine Sharp*! There are lots of others equally good – in fact, there have been no bad ones – but such is my vanity, I send the two in which my own sketch is mentioned. Though even here it is really attributed to Farjeon!

It was one of the most exciting evenings I have spent. A couple of nights before I had been to the dress rehearsals at which most things that could go wrong, did. My sketch was done so shockingly that I almost sank under the seat with shame and the thought of having to face it with an audience was almost too much. I spent a miserable couple of days, not helped at all by my developing a violent cold. On the night I arrived at the theatre with my nose hanging on by a couple of shreds of red flesh and feeling as if I had dressed

for a wake. But the moment I entered the theatre I knew this was going to be an evening, and it was – everything went with a swing – it is the most elegant revue I have seen, and I am sure it will be the talk of the town.[fn9] (I feel I can speak like this because after all I only had a very small finger in the pie.) And even if it doesn't make me *Alguien*, or even *Quelqu'un*[fn10] I am a little bit farther on the way.

If only you'd been there. But I hope we shall be able to share some much more important triumphs later on.

I have just let myself be run into taking another flat. Some time ago, Roy de Maistre did up a house in Eccleston Street (just round the corner) and has been trying to let off the top part as flats. He has a studio himself on the ground floor at the back, the front ground floor has been let to a florist (very handy when visitors come), there is to be an office on the first floor, and now I propose to take the two top ones.

I shudder in the middle of the night when I think of the money I shall have to spend. But *tant pis*,[fn11] it is going to look nice even if it takes me into the bankruptcy court[fn12] …

I leave you now for the gas man. Until next time, my dear.

Love,

Patrick.

13 Eccleston Street, 16.ii.38

TO PEPE MAMBLAS

I moved in last Thursday or Friday; already I forget; anyway the workmen had not really finished – nor have they now, for that matter, one man comes and bangs in a nail, goes away, and twenty-four hours pass before I have persuaded another man to carry on with the good work. I still have a funny little woman, rather like George's Alice,[fn13] crouching on the stairs sewing at the carpets.

The sitting room is going to be charming. The brown-pink carpet and the bright yellow curtains are a great success. You will have to see them before they are dirty. I am afraid

the coal stove, which nevertheless is a great joy, will very quickly do for them …

I have been doing sums in my head all the morning, for my going to St. Jean-de-Luz is going to depend on the state of my bank balance. I don't know that I could very well slip off with an overdraft unpaid and a large bill at one of the shops. All this may sound very unsophisticated, but it is the first time I have launched out in this particular way and I don't know what one does in the circumstances. Anyway, if you are going to disappear over the Spanish frontier and stay there for some time, I would have to make the effort to see you – somehow.

I went to the revue again the other night. They nearly always have a full house now, and lots of people go regularly and laugh before the joke comes – irritating though it will help to keep the show on. I am sending you a copy of *Punch* in which there is quite a good notice of the revue in general – and my sketch comes in for a little praise.[fn14] There is something in the air about a wireless revue – about which I believe I am going to be approached.

You finish up your letter with such a torrent of questions that I hardly know how to cope with them. Money has not yet come my way, except for the little weekly dribble from the revue. My inheritance seems to be disappearing in death duties. People who took no notice before are beginning to consider me, a state of affairs which makes me see how difficult it would be to recognise genuine friendship if one achieved success. But it does not look as if I shall have to worry seriously about that for some time.

I met a very pleasant pianist called Shepherd Munn a few weeks ago and have been seeing him on and off. Otherwise no new acquaintances – you know I don't make them easily.

I must go now and cook my lunch on my very handsome new black-and-white gas stove. I wish you were here to

share my meal! But perhaps we shall be doing that soon somewhere in the south.

13 Eccleston Street, 17.iii.38
TO PEPE MAMBLAS
My dear Pepe,
If there is any truth in the news one reads in the papers, the Spanish war looks as if it will soon be at an end. I sincerely hope for your sake that it is true. Otherwise the situation looks very black indeed. I fear we only begin where you are leaving off. One feels a wave of hysteria rising everywhere, as if people are going to think themselves into a European War even if there is a possibility of avoiding one. I am moving in a fog myself. For as you know, I have no head for international, or indeed any variety of politics – one is either born with it or one isn't. How do you think things will develop yourself?

Last week-end was particularly depressing. I went up to Trafalgar Square where of course there was a large meeting in progress, organised by Gollancz and his satellites.[fn15] People stretched right back to the edge of the National Gallery. What interested me was that by squeezing my way to within about twenty yards of the speaker on the plinth I could catch about one word in his twenty, so that of all those hundreds of people standing there, no more than 5% can have caught anything intelligible. All the same, the passive enjoyment of the crowd was immense and no doubt it went home feeling that it had taken part in something momentous.

Again I have no entertaining news for you. There is so much going on outside that one's own small activities seem to have been damped down. I have put in a lot of time at work. And one evening I went to see a production of *The Three Sisters*.[fn16] It was the fourth time I had seen the play, so I begin to feel I am familiar with it. I don't know if you like

Chekov? To me, seeing one of his plays, especially *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Three Sisters*, is like having every emotion I have ever experienced played out before me in one evening. It is usually a wearing experience, but there is a polish about this present production that keeps it all very detached. A good thing at the moment really, for I don't think one should go out of one's way to accumulate this particular kind of *nostalgie*.

The weather continues to be very lovely mild and occasionally sunny. This week-end I am going up to Oxford. I suppose I should look forward to a change of scene, air, and all those other things, but I don't. For I feel that I shall have a week-end of my cousin Betty in one of her Brontë-esque moods. Not that I am not very fond of her. But she is inclined to take up that 'myself-at-war-with-the-universe' attitude and to think that no one else can ever be affected in the same way. In the long run it is very trying.

Look after yourself, my dear. And let me know soon that you have some really satisfactory news of your country.

With much love,

Patrick.

13 Eccleston Street, 23.iii.38

TO PEPE MAMBLAS

I must say the bombardment of Barcelona was a horrible business, Pepe. I can't see that any end can justify such a means. For the first time in the whole war I think I have been really conscious of what it signifies – I suppose really the events of the last few weeks have brought us much closer to it – one sees what may be in store for all of us.[fn17]

They are starting to make appeals here for volunteers to train for the possibility of air-raids – people who will be ready to help the first-aid units, police, firemen etc. as a matter of course. I went along this afternoon and offered myself as a potential fireman! I have not yet heard what it will imply – whether the training will be merely theoretical,