



MAX CAVITCH, Ph.D.

SAFE, BUT NOT *TOO* SAFE: SCENES FROM AN EPISTOLARY ROMANCE

Abstract. The following correspondence, incomplete and edited for length, was conducted between 2005 and 2017—12 years out of the 15-year-long span of my almost entirely epistolary friendship with Philip Bromberg. With all the casualness and inadvertency of an email exchange, it nevertheless speaks—for us both—far more eloquently than anything I could write *about* the history of our friendship and about the various ways in which we shared our love of language with each other, across various distances and disciplinary boundaries.¹

Keywords: correspondence, intersubjectivity, friendship, literature, mourning

In the latter part of 2005, Philip Bromberg emailed me, out of the blue, with a sweetly unguarded narcissistic inquiry. I replied in kind, and on it went, back and forth, until, like Robert Frost’s mower in “The Tuft of Flowers” (1913), he and I each seemed to find:

a spirit kindred to my own;
So that henceforth I worked no more alone;

But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade;

And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.

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¹The roman numerals in the correspondence between the Author and Philip Bromberg direct the reader to “Editors’ Notes” for reference or definition. These “Notes” can be found at the end, following the author’s bio.

Much like lost brothers who are reunited late in life, we shared an instant rapport and did our best to cultivate it in a kind of virtual garden, sowing ideas and jokes, weeding out the occasional shoots of diffidence and anger, watering one another's thoughts, weathering all seasons (and there were some *bad* seasons), working together, though apart, in the loam of the language we both loved, throughout those 15 years, until he had to go his way alone.

Alone, but not *too* alone. For just as the "termination" of an analysis can't terminate the relationship it engenders, the death of a friend can't kill the friendship, which continues in ways that have been variously observed and tentatively theorized. As some would describe it, I still interact with an idiosyncratic *Philip-object* that is internal to my psychic functioning. Others would remind me that I remain engaged, as Philip's mourner, in a complex struggle to *introject* my Philip-object and not succumb to a morbid fantasy of its *incorporation*. Others still would join me in characterizing my ongoing relationship with Philip as, even now, a relationship between *two subjects*, who continue to relate *intersubjectively*.

I believe—for reasons that have everything to do with what I know about the experiences of reading and writing—that I continue to address Philip as a subject and that he continues to address me as a subject. I believe that the experience of reading is an intersubjective experience, one in which reader and writer act as *accomplices*. I borrow the word *accomplice* from the French anthropologist and memoirist, Michel Leiris, who tells us in his lubriciously confessional autobiography, *L'age d'homme* (1939), that what he see(k)s in a reader is "less a judge than an accomplice [*moins un juge qu'un complice*]."

While there are, in the following emails, many advertent and inadvertent revelations of an inevitably confessional or autobiographical nature, there's certainly nothing lubricious about them. Nevertheless, the shadow of mischief or wrongdoing that is cast upon both writer and reader by Leiris's term *complice/accomplice* needn't be thought of as something easily—or advisedly—dispelled. The substance of this shadow—think of it as a kind of shared mantel—is precisely the enfolding or interweaving (the Latin root of "[ac]complice" is *compli-care*, meaning to fold or weave together) of two subjectivities and, consequently, of the many kinds of misdoing and undoing that, as Philip keeps reminding us, intersubjectivity always entails.

Philip is dead. Yet, as I continue to read and re-read his writings—whether emails addressed only to me or one of his books or articles—he speaks to me just as he speaks to you: in a particular idiom, about his experiences, thoughts, feelings, memories, and desires, according to the conscious and unconscious choices he has made regarding what to tell and how to tell it. As his reader, I—like you—have no choice but to allow elements of the story he’s constructed about his experiences to take up shop, as it were, in my own mind, where they help forge and re-forge, with each re-reading, impressions of the person he was and is: someone I recognize, still, as a whole person, a subject, like myself, with his own agency and psyche.

These impressions—whether I’m reading for the first time or the tenth—are also necessarily shaped and re-shaped by my own subjectivity, by my own conscious and unconscious beliefs, assumptions, memories, thoughts, and feelings, even as my subjectivity is altered in my repeated encounters with Philip’s alterity. For with every reading I will inevitably—and unpredictably—doubt or resist or oppose certain aspects of his character and idiom that trouble or confuse my openness to transformation, as and when I read. And my own inevitable failures or refusals of recognition will, repeatedly, transform Philip’s subjectivity, precisely because it is not reducible to his writings as such—as a mere object existing exclusively for my uses and needs. I, too, still exist *for* him, even though he no longer has any discrete knowledge of *me*.

One could object that all I’m describing is the “virtual” convergence of Philip-as-text and myself-as-reader—in other words, nothing more than a *fantasy* of intersubjectivity. But *all* intersubjective encounters, including those that take place face-to-face, have strong elements of fantasy. We make each other up as we go. The error made by many people—including many psychoanalysts as well as many theorists of reading—is to posit self-differentiation as the foredoomed goal of reading as such. In the resulting game of endless tropological substitutions there can be no form of mutual recognition that differs appreciably from, say, the fictionalized recognitions of novelistic characters.

But some of us know better. And we know better, in part, because of Philip’s own writings, in which the reader’s interpellation does not depend on prior acquaintance or even on direct address. Philip writes with an awareness of addressing an “implied” reader that is not yet a

subject, but that becomes a subject—and an *accomplice*—every time they open one of his books ... or, if you continue reading beyond this point, the record of a 15-year-long psychoanalytic dialogue, in which Philip and I, to this day, remain complicit.

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[Our correspondence and our friendship began with the following email exchange from late-summer/early-fall 2005.]

Dear Professor Cavitch,

I just wanted to tell you how pleased (and amazed) I was to discover that your syllabus for 10/20 included one of my papers, “Standing in the Spaces.” Initially I was bewildered by its presence in an “advanced seminar on early American literature and culture.” But when I paid closer attention to your course description it then made sense; we clearly hold a similar sensibility about this subject. I discovered that your seminar “stipulates a dialectical relation between remembering and forgetting” and that you will take as your “starting point the assumption that remembering and forgetting are contradictory forms of experience that may be shaped, in their opposition, into meaningful if temporary structures of understanding.” Even closer to my heart is your statement as to the aim of the course: “NOT TO ACHIEVE A RECONCILIATION (SYNTHESIS) of remembering and forgetting, but rather to interpret and evaluate the temporary structures of understanding ... that illuminate the stakes of their opposition.”

This leaves me wondering only about the manner in which you discovered my work. Whatever the answer, I am totally delighted that you find it useful in teaching a course as significant as this one. Each session sounds fascinating and illuminating, and I wish I could be a fly on the wall for the entire course. Judging from the syllabus I have no doubt that you are an extraordinary teacher.

If you should care to do so and have the time, I would welcome anything you might wish to share as to the thoughts your class had about my article. I will understand if that is not possible, and in either instance I want to thank you and offer my best wishes.

Philip Bromberg

Dear Dr. Bromberg,

It's wonderful to hear from you. I'm very gratified to learn of the pleasure and sense of recognition you felt upon reading the descriptive language of my syllabus. You asked how I discovered your work. I must admit that I did so only recently, but you'll excuse the ignorance of a mere amateur of the field. My reading in psychoanalytic theory has, over the years, developed into a particular sense of kinship with those in the Kleinian/object relations tradition, extending from Fairbairn and Winnicott to more recent theorist-practitioners like Christopher Bollas (a particular favorite of mine, and a strong influence on some of my critical writing on mourning literature, the subject of my first book). While writing the syllabus for "Histories of Forgetting," it seemed clear to me that nations, like individuals, have a dissociative structure, though it didn't seem adequate to think of this structure only in relation to profound trauma and/or extreme pathology. Yet everything I had read, or could find to read, on the subject of dissociation was linked to violent trauma and extreme pathologies like DID. I wanted to read something that would talk extensively about dissociation as a much more common part of lived experience. I started with Nancy McWilliams, and then I asked around among people I know in the field (including my own therapist!), and they all said: "Philip Bromberg." I must tell you, though, getting ahold of a copy of **Standing in the Spaces** wasn't easy. And now that I've read it, I think your publisher is very unwise not to distribute and market the book more widely. Though addressed to clinicians and theorists, it is precisely the kind of book that has the power to reach psychoanalytically minded humanists such as myself. It's wonderfully well written, with a very literary sensibility, and it speaks originally to a vital but seriously understudied dimension of intersubjective experience in a way that has rich implications for any student of the human condition. I'm so glad to have discovered it. I'll remember to report back to you at the end of October with an account of our in-class discussion of your work. Thanks again for getting in touch!

All best, Max

Dear Max,

Thanks so much for the letter. Now that I know the route you took to find my book I'm doubly honored; it required more than a bit of sleuthing on your part, and from what you wrote in your generous

response to its content, you obviously feel that it repaid the effort expended in discovering it.

The fact that you were specifically trying to find a writer who spoke to the idea of dissociation as a common part of lived experience is very heartening; the fact that all your informants pointed you in my direction is also gratifying, because it means that people in my own field “get” my main point regardless of the degree to which they agree with it; the fact that you had a hard time finding it is valuable information though I’m not thrilled to hear it. It is not marketed aggressively at the retail bookstore level, as is true of most books in my field. And this is notwithstanding the fact that, as a professional book, *Standing in the Spaces* has sold quite well. The majority of sales are made either online, directly through the publisher, or through bookdealers at professional meetings.

I don’t believe my publisher has ever seriously considered it having a potential market as a “trade” book, but I’m going to now raise such a possibility with him and see how he responds. So, I thank you for both your praise of my writing and for your thoughts about a potential new readership. If I may, I would like to quote your comments verbatim (keeping your name anonymous, of course). I think that your actual words would have a strong impact, not unlike their effect on me. Especially persuasive is your observation that the book has “implications for any student of the human condition.”

I’ve written a second book, *Awakening the Dreamer*, that should be released sometime during the first part of 2006, and I would like to ask The Analytic Press to send you a complimentary copy. But you will need to give me your mailing address, which I don’t have.

My best, Philip

[I did, and PB did. We continued to correspond intermittently over the following six years—during which period I also had the privilege of being able to e-introduce PB to one of my dearest friends, New York psychoanalyst Maggie Robbins (see this issue).]

February 26, 2011

Dear Philip,

Maggie Robbins recently relayed a greeting from you, which was very nice to receive, and I thought I’d reciprocate directly. As it happens, I will be revisiting some of your work with my graduate students

next week, as I am currently teaching my “Histories of Forgetting” seminar, to which your work on dissociation remains vital. (You may recall I taught this course once before, in 2005, which I believe first led to our being in touch.) I’ve also just read with pleasure your essay in Petrucelli’s recent collection on *Longing*—a volume that Maggie recommended to me after I complained to her about how frustrating and lamentable it was that the writing of psychoanalysis generally has so little of a sustained and thoughtful nature to say about romantic love (exceptions like Mitchell’s *Can Love Last* only proving the rule).

Things are OK here in Philadelphia. I hope things are well with you.

All best, Max

FEBRUARY 27, 2011

Dear Max,

Hearing from you is such a welcome surprise. As you already know, I feel close to you in ways that neither time nor distance can ever diminish [...]. And knowing that you will again be discussing my work on dissociation in your “Histories of Forgetting” seminar, adds to it.

Your career, as best I can discern from your website, is moving gracefully upward academically, and spiritedly along in directions that continue to tap into the wide scope of your intellect, your power as educator, and your humanity. No surprise here. I hope you are also having much pleasure—including fun—with it all [...].

Thanks for your comment about my essay in Petrucelli’s book. In expanded form it will be the final chapter in my new book (due for release this Summer). (I felt especially proud that you include my work in the same mental space that contains your admiration of Steve Mitchell. I admit that I am a bit of a romantic, but I don’t think of myself as having much to say about romantic love—at least not directly). I’m pasting in a link to the Routledge pre-publication page so you can see the overview of my book and also the dust jacket (that I think looks nifty). Do not order a copy because I am having one sent to you. (I’m also pasting-in a link to the Amazon.com page because you get a better view of the dust jacket if you enlarge it. Incidentally, if you have not yet read Abby Stein’s chapter in Petrucelli’s book, I recommend it highly. Also, Wilma Bucci’s chapter:

<http://www.routledgejournalofmentalhealth.com/the-shadow-of-the-tsunami-9780415886949>

http://www.amazon.com/Shadow-Tsunami-Growth-Relational-Mind/dp/0415886945/ref=sr_1_7?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1294793045&sr=1-7

To conclude, things are indeed well with me, pretty much on all counts even though [...] I tend to hedge my bet when I reply to “How are you?”

Warm regards, Philip

February 28, 2011

Dear Philip,

I’m eagerly looking forward to *The Shadow of the Tsunami!* The Stein and Bucci essays are, I believe, in a different Petrucelli collection—one that I have not looked into yet ... but will!

The *Longing* volume does not, in fact, have a great deal to say about romantic love. I will keep searching. What I’d like to find is something that takes up the post-Messler (i.e., post-drive-theory) perspective on oedipal romance (*beyond* rather than chiefly within the clinical dyad), which she introduced so tantalizingly in “Love in the Afternoon,” but which, even today, seems to remain an impossible topic for really thoroughly smart and playful clinical/theoretical inquiry. Why is that? Too hard to compete with Proust? Or is love (as *not* equivalent to desire, or, for that matter, to transference-love, or analytic-love) just not a scientific-enough topic in today’s hostile climate toward psychodynamic treatment?

Yours, Max

March 1, 2011

Aha! Now I understand. The Jean Petrucelli book that you will need is: *Knowing, Not-Knowing and Sort-of-Knowing: Psychoanalysis and the Experience of Uncertainty*.

And about the relative absence of psychoanalytic writing on romantic love, especially what you call the lack of “smart and playful clinical/theoretical inquiry,” I think you are on to something important in your use of the word “playful.” A thoroughly smart writer who can play with a serious subject without being facetious, casual, or demeaning is a rarity in any field. You, of course, are one of those rarities.

Warmly, Philip

March 11, 2011

Dear Philip,

Well, this is what it's like to be at the margin of the analytic fold: I come to things only belatedly, if at all. Now that I've gotten hold of that latest Petrucelli collection you mentioned, I see that you've done me the great kindness of discussing—on not just one but two occasions: your 2008 conference keynote and its printed version in the Petrucelli volume—my review of *Awakening the Dreamer*. I now find myself thinking of our having been engaged, chiefly in print, in *both* an enactment of *and* a reflection upon the phenomenon of recognition. “Recognition” both in the banal (though still very important and gratifying) sense of mutual professional recognition across disciplines, and in the even more valuable, psychoanalytic sense of beginning to see the other's subjective states, seeing them as important, and relating to them as best one can. Thanks for that.

And, by way of thanks, here's another little poem (if you don't already know it) to add to your repertoire. It's (to my mind) a shockingly brilliant as well as almost too-moving poem about recognition—indeed, one could say it's about recognizing, not-recognizing, and sort-of-recognizing!

[*This email concluded with the text of Randall Jarrell's 1949 poem, "A Sick Child" (<https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/>).]*

[*PB's undated, unsigned response.*]

“As best one can,” indeed. I am now, and with great pleasure, about to break my own rule about never sending anyone a chapter of a new book until the book is released. I cannot resist sending you the Preface, which is attached below. My reason, besides my certainty that you will respect my “for your eyes only” need, is that I have used the Preface in a manner that embodies why you (and I) think of recognition as a “phenomenon” and not simply a process. Also, and not without meaning for me, I am in the Preface once again crossing the interdisciplinary boundary with regard to poetry—this time, Frost.

March 22, 2011

Dear Philip,

Yes, I have my copy of *The Bat-Poet* here [*In an email not included here, PB had asked if I knew this book, saying: "I have had it in my office for many years, and every so often reread it for inspiration."*],

gifted to me at age three, with illustrations by Sendak (another great contributor to the writing of psychoanalysis).

Thank you, so much, for sharing the manuscript Preface from your forthcoming book. If, while reading the entire book once it appears (July?), I have to pause to wipe my eyes and blow my nose with similar frequency, it will take me a very long time to read it. My less maudlin reactions have to do with what you say about writing-and-reading, and about Frost.

It's so true, as you say, that the great pathos of authorship is the inability to know, for the most part, if/when/how one is being read. As Walt Whitman lamented, we can't **feel** it when other people read us. And yet, as Whitman also apprehended (and as Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer helps remind us), things do nevertheless happen at a distance—and distances themselves (temporal as well as spatial) are always being annihilated, in one way or another. I think authorship doesn't just entail but fundamentally **is**, as you put it, the experience of "losing [one's] ability to imagine being recognized 'as who he is.'" Moreover, I've been thinking more and more of late about writing as being inherently dissociative, and that publishing what one writes often works to shore up, as defensive mechanism, otherwise potentially salutary dynamic aspects (as well as the less salutary ones) of the dissociative nature of writing. For example, my first book was about mourning poetry, and, while I was writing it, I often explained to people (who were kind enough to ask) that I was writing a book about mourning because I was such a bad mourner in my own life. I learned a lot about mourning while writing that book, and I put a lot of what I learned into it, which included, implicitly at least, some self-directed exhortations regarding how I might become a slightly better mourner. And yet, since the book was published, I seem to have spent most of my time living my life as if I'd forgotten what I learned and put into the book—for example, about the need to make of mourning something other than merely and exclusively a perpetual grievance against the past, a righteous machine for calculating and distributing blame. Why can't I keep this in mind? Would I be better able to keep it in mind—and put this apparent wisdom into practice—if I'd never written/published that book?

Frost is surely a genius of as yet unrecognized proportions—still often thought of, and taught, as a quaint regionalist. But of course he's anything but quaint, or regional. The best thing we can do is to keep reading him. But, in the spaces in between, you might enjoy taking a

look at what is still, after more than 30 years, the smartest (and best written) book about him: Dick Poirier's *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing*. Dick added an Afterword to the 1990 second edition, with which you might like to begin, not only because it is largely on Winnicott, but also because, like your Preface, it was that part of the book Dick wrote last, the farewell that hails us. Of course, it's not irrelevant to say here that Dick was my teacher in grad school and beyond, that he died last year, and that I'm still pretty much at a loss as to how to mourn him. To which Dick would undoubtedly say, in his very deep, cluttered, north-of-Boston growl: "Well, there you are!"

Yours, Max

Dear Max,

Freud, Jarrell, and Sendak. To think about them as a threesome is a rare happening (even though I have *felt* it), but to share that experience with someone who feels the same way is a step into that thing we write to each other about that is so hard to name. I guess I'm not surprised that you were gifted *The Bat Poet* at age three, even less surprised that you still have it, and certain that you understand why I continue to turn to it for inspiration—especially at those moments when I'm not feeling safe with how far I have strayed from the paths accepted by others as "legitimate."

Your reaction to my manuscript Preface moves me deeply; not just because you felt so deeply, but because you shared that with me. What you call your "less maudlin" reaction is every bit as intimate. There is a myth about mourning that has been spread by ancient psychoanalysts and passed down to each succeeding generation: People can be divided into those who cannot mourn and those who can; even worse, those in the first category are, ipso facto, defined as ill (developmentally), and those in the second category as healthy (except for a few routine conflicts to straighten out). Those guys would find it hard to believe that you (and I) learned a lot about mourning through writing. I have found that the achievement is not in the category of a "cure" as much as a process of evolution. The old channels do not just disappear. They remain part of who we are, but if we are dedicated to our own growth the newer self-experience will resurface even though we worry it may have been lost forever. The amazing part is that, when it resurfaces, we experience it as part of an internal struggle rather than two different and austere separate

experiences. I'm always asking, impatiently, "Why can't I keep it in mind?" But when I relax about it I can access both feelings at the same time—and that leads to an internal dialogue which is unpredictable but almost invariably liberating. Would you have been a "better mourner" if you hadn't written that book? Maybe! But why would you want to be a better mourner? The way things turned out you are not a mourner at all; you are able to mourn but are also struggling with other parts of you that feel entitled to hold a grudge. Those parts must be honored if mourning is to feel like mourning rather than "being a mourner."

About Frost, thank you, my friend, for sharing your deep understanding of the man and the poet. And thank you for pointing me to Dick Poirier's book. I will order the 1990 second edition and read it while thinking of him as your mentor and maybe even hearing his growl.

All in all, Max, I bless having discovered that I love to write—including the hateful times I feel blocked and wonder if I will ever again have anything to say. When I can feel grief for my mother (whose unmet yearning to be a writer holds the guilt behind my seemingly lost capacity at those moments) I can feel my energy returning.

Yours too, Philip

JULY 27, 2011

Dear Max,

This is a ridiculously delayed thank you for having introduced me to him through *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing*. It took me so long to respond because I didn't want to simply read the Afterword and then write you. I was so turned on by that chapter that I made up my mind to tackle the rest of the book despite my fear that it would require so much background I did not possess that it would be a futile effort. Well, I have been trying, and I just completed it as best I could—which was in one way trying to use parts of my mind that were saying "Leave me the fuck alone and let me sleep," while another part was saying "So you don't have to understand everything. No final exam. See where it takes you."

It was well worth it. Your friend and mentor was quite a writer. I felt like he was talking to me conversationally—but I expect that is no surprise to you. I learned quite a bit about how to think about poetry. I'm not sure how much I learned about poetry, but I think that a few things got through. I found myself more and more being at home with the poems themselves as I read. Quite remarkable.

This is an expression of my gratitude. It is also my way of reconnecting to a friend I value a great deal.

Yours, Philip

July 30, 2011

Dear Philip,

I don't know how you find the time to follow through so thoroughly on your vast range of intellectual commitments and inclinations. How wonderful that you were able to read all of Dick's Frost book; he really was a special writer, and a special thinker about writing. And a fierce, mercurial, sweet, iconoclastic, reactionary, gruff, elegant, bigoted, gracious, eloquent, profane man—in other words, quite a community of diverse self-states!

And yes: who wants to “be” a mourner? Like one of those Dickensian caricatures, done up in jet crape and sealskin, perennially dragging one's own psychic corpse behind some tricked-out hearse, or bowing endlessly before a moldy-baldachin-draped catafalque. I do wish, though, that I was more at home with death, in all its real and unreal dimensions—not in order to *stay* at home with death (like Thoreau, I fear most to be dead while still alive), but to be better able to approach and befriend it, the way Scout finally came to be able to do with Boo Radley.

Here am I, moments before attending the July 14th Patti Smith concert at Castle Clinton, wearing a tee-shirt whose message expresses an aspect of this aspirational sentiment (no accident that “Liberty” is in the shot as well):



All best, Max

[undated email from July/August 2011]

Dear Max,

Believe me, I am not compulsive about intellectual commitments, and I tend to follow through only on what connects me to feeling alive. You [...] happily entered my life and that's no small gift to me. I think that I too am most afraid to be dead while still alive, so I could easily be wearing the same t-shirt in that photo of you looking slyly over your shoulder as you decide what (or who) is next. It is there for all to see: your code-message about self-states

And, yes, Dick Poirier deserves every one of your adjectives. I *felt* the shifts in him as I read, and I think that this contributed most to my sense of him as talking to me conversationally. But I also think that you may be insufficiently aware of your own diversity of self-states. That photo reveals that you are both Scout and Boo Radley. The more time they spend *with* each other the more your "aspirational statement" will be part of your lived life. Why "part?" Because they will give you what you already have but will be able to use together without losing either. Sorry, I know I get (ugh) preachy but I couldn't resist my identification with your comment about it being no accident that "Liberty" is in the shot.

Yours, Philip

March 24, 2012

Hello Max,

First, the good: It lets us send things to each other—like the attached file of the Plenary talk I presented at the recent IARPP conference in NYC. Email makes it so much easier. I want you to read it for many reasons. The part about Richard Poirier is just one, as is my acknowledging your central role in my learning about him. Also, I felt that you might like my thoughts on the subject of imagination and maybe even my stumbling-along rendering of my stumbling-along "supervision/therapy" that I call a "vignette." So, this is what I think of as the good aspect of email.

As an aside (but an important one to me), my plenary is in the process of being rewritten and revised for publication in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, so I ask you, please, to keep it for your eyes only since I prefer not to have the presentation draft circulated.

Now the bad side of email: What I wanted most is that you could have *heard* it, but I learned, sadly, that you were not there. Most of all, I wanted us to meet in person. It has been too long that we have not even heard the voice of the other—much less been with each other face to face.

I don't want to intrude—but even if I do intrude, it is worth it (to me). I would love to figure out a first step toward making our relationship more personal. The telephone might be a way to start. Do you get to NYC? I figure you do. We could meet for lunch or dinner. What do you say?

[*unsigned*]

MARCH 29, 2012

[*Sometimes, PB would interpolate his responses between the lines of my emails, as he did here; his words are italicized and indented.*]

Dear Philip,

Your e-mail arrived while I was at a conference in France, thus the delay getting back to you. You're quite right about e-mail.

Thank you so much for sharing the text of your keynote address, which I was unable to attend. I hope your colleagues are not getting sick of hearing about me.

PB: Any colleague of mine who is getting sick of hearing me talk about you has fallen headfirst into a chilly Kleinian swamp with too much of their naked envy hanging out.

I will look forward to reading the text carefully in the coming weeks, as I continue to revisit other, published writings of yours while drafting the essay I was invited to contribute to a forthcoming special issue of *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*.

*PB: Yes, I was told by the Editors of your acceptance. When they asked me to suggest a few people who I might wish them to ask, you were at the top of the list. And it turns out that you were also at the top of **theirs**. Well, you already know how I feel about you. To have you and your writing once more associated with me and my writing is a joy that is more special than you can imagine. I didn't write about it in my initial email because I didn't want to wake you into full consciousness in case you were half asleep when you said yes. But your bringing the*

*subject up on your own lets me tell you that the “Special Issue” became **truly** special once I knew that you were going to be part of it.*

You are very generous not only to invoke my presence publicly, but also to call for it directly. It is somewhat remarkable that, after—what? —seven years, we still have neither met nor spoken. But I tend to be a fairly withdrawn person who likes his writing self best;

PB: *Me too.*

also, I am able to be in New York much less frequently than I want to be.

PB: *I, on the other hand, am able to be in New York much **more** frequently than I want to be. But there’s nothing I can do about it but make dumb jokes.*

In France last week, I was feeling particularly spectral among the crowds of young, happy-seeming people in Aix and in Paris. To feel dead inside—as chronically depressed people so often do, of course—is one thing; to feel that one is invisible is yet another. This is dreary, I know. And it’s not that various things aren’t going well. What my psychopharmacologist likes to refer to as my “executive function,” for example, remains in good order, which means getting things done, and one likes to get things done. Tick-tock, right?

PB: *I don’t know how old/young you are, but I suspect it is pretty young to have achieved this much acknowledgment for something that ordinarily is not achieved till later in life. Yeah, “one likes to get things done,” but that doesn’t account for your extraordinary blend of scholarship and vision. Your “executive function” not only keeps the machine running but it also makes your academic advancement an inevitability. I know you at least well enough to know that while it is the “tick-tock” that makes the “various things” go well, it is the moments when you corral the elusive “something else” that makes what you do have meaning and keeps you going in spite of depression and yes, even feeling invisible.*

All I can say about this personally is that it seems to get easier with age. It did for me and I’m not talking about visibility. In fact, I sort of think

that the opposite of “invisibility” is not visibility but “meaning.” I strongly suspect that your trajectory will be similar. You cherish your “writing self” in the same way I do. I get lost in it. Or rather I get found in it. As I aged, I found myself able to get lost in otherness that didn’t depend on the other being just another of my self-states. For some reason I could let my boundary down to more people in the real world. Not at all sure how it happened. But it did. Sure, I sometimes wish it happened when I was younger, but that isn’t a very strong feeling because I get so much from what is there now.

Also, at the end of this semester, I begin my next sabbatical, and I’m very much looking forward to finishing my next book and a number of other projects that have been slowed down considerably by many added administrative duties over the past three years. Another thing sabbatical means is that it will be easier to spend at least a bit more time in New York. So I hope that, indeed, we can have a chance to meet soon, as you have so kindly urged.

I wonder if you have any upcoming lectures or presentations in New York that are not audience restricted. Such an occasion would give me a chance to hear you speak publicly (everyone says it’s something you do extremely well) and also perhaps to get together for a meal before or afterwards.

*PB: I am taking a two-month summer break this year (July and August) because I will be giving my office a much-needed face-lift after fifteen years and I can use the additional time. Maybe it will be possible for us to get together then? Your sabbatical and my lengthy vacation might work together. Or we could wait till the Fall if you prefer but getting together for dinner with someone special before or after I present at a meeting has always tended to be disappointingly unrelaxed. Before the meeting is usually impossible for a variety of reasons, and after the meeting is most often very late and also so infused with my identity as “presenter” that the essence of the pleasure at being **together** is subsumed conversationally by an artificial (albeit unconscious) emphasis on the role that has been defining me all evening. Know what I mean? I want us to get to know **each other** better. I am not saying that I don’t want to see you if you come to a meeting. In fact, it is just the opposite. I would introduce you to **everyone**—even if I had to press-gang you into hanging around. But maybe you would hate that.*

So—even though I remain up to this point a kind of specter to you—thank you, Philip, for continuing, through your warm and thoughtful attention and encouragements, to feel a bit less spectral. And I'll be looking forward to whatever non-virtual encounter we can arrange for the near future.

PB: *Likewise, Max!*

Yours, Max

And yours too, Philip

[undated, unsigned email from April/May 2012]

Dear Max,

Your email is definitely a good start. Let's see if we can edge our spectral energy a bit closer to periodic palpability—which does not mean that we must give up our virtual reality as a relational context. We each know it appeals to the other as well as ourselves or we wouldn't be using it this way for so long.

MAY 8, 2012

Dear Philip,

I don't know if you've heard that Maurice Sendak has died. You were one of the first people I thought of when the news came—remembering our exchange about *The Bat-Poet*.

You may have heard this interview he gave last year. If not, I know you will find it, as I did, one of the most extraordinary conversations I've ever heard: <http://www.npr.org/2011/12/29/144077273/maurice-sendak-on-life-death-and-childrens-lit>.

Yours, Max

MAY 8, 2012

Dear Max,

No, I had not heard, but I just accessed his *Times* obit, thanks to you. Since you know just about everyone worth knowing I wondered if the beloved Max of the inner-rumpus complexity could possibly be the Max that Sendak knew and loved—but why would I think such a foolish thing, right? Notice the dash in my sentence structure? I would

never notice it were it not for Max. I'll be listening to the interview shortly.

Yours, Philip

MAY 8, 2012

I recognized the Sendak in the interview as someone who I know from inside. I always loved him as an artist and a creator, but I never “knew” why. In the interview he tried to put the words to who he is, and the words became part of him. I'm sure you noticed how wonderfully embarrassed she (the interviewer) became at being known so intimately, and how careful he was to not require her to be more than was possible once he had told her how unique he recognized her to be. I am grateful to you for knowing me in a similar way. You have given me this from the start. And you give it again in thinking of me as one of the first to let know of his death and “knowing” I would find the interview, as you did, one of the most extraordinary conversations you've ever heard. Yes, *The Bat-Poet* is there, but whatever the something is that makes an “atheist” like Sendak know what God is, it made us friends before we knew what we knew about each other. But I still look forward to our “meeting.”

Yours, Philip

MAY 8, 2012

I never met Sendak. I had one chance, in college—a breakfast date. But I slept through it “by mistake”—I was in the middle of a major depressive episode. I had to take the next two semesters off.

But I was born in 1963, the same year *WTWTA* was published, and it was one of the first books I learned to read by. So naturally for a long while I assumed (at an age when wishing and assuming can still be precisely the same thing—that is, precisely the same feeling) that I *was* the boy, “Max,” that Sendak knew and loved—or that someone, somewhere did. I guess he was my family romance. I think today I felt orphaned, a bit, a second time.

I do know some great people, of course. One of them—my friend Lauren [Berlant], who teaches at the U. of Chicago—wrote this today: “What I appreciate in [Sendak] is his acute attention to the simultaneously unbearable overcloseness and alterity of the situation of love that brings us to the point of wanting to destroy it and ourselves in it

because it is mostly not simple and we are mostly bad at giving and reading cues for making it less lonely.”

But Sendak himself should always have the last word. Here’s something he told the same NPR interviewer, the brilliant Terry Gross, in one of their earlier conversations:

Once a little boy sent me a charming card with a little drawing on it. I loved it. I answer all my children’s letters—sometimes very hastily—but this one I lingered over. I sent him a card and I drew a picture of a Wild Thing on it. I wrote, “Dear Jim: I loved your card.” Then I got a letter back from his mother and she said, “Jim loved your card so much he ate it.” That to me was one of the highest compliments I’ve ever received. He didn’t care that it was an original Maurice Sendak drawing or anything. He saw it, he loved it, he ate it.

[*unsigned*]

OCTOBER 24, 2012

Dear Philip,

Just a quick note to say that, happily, circumstances make it possible for me to attend your lecture at White² tonight.

I’m looking forward to the lecture and, of course, to the chance to say hello to you in person at long last.

Yours, Max

APRIL 15, 2013

Dear Philip,

Ruth kindly passed along your response to my essay. Although she seemed a bit surprised at your warmly sympathetic remarks, I was not. I knew that you would “get” it. It was indeed a hard essay to write, most of all for the obvious reason that I do not have the years of clinical experience treating patients to help me balance and inform my singular experiences as a patient and as a citizen of the world “out there” with what is possible and desirable with large and diverse cohorts of patients. The practitioner’s perspective is always the great gap in my psychoanalytic writing. But I also believe (the evidence is everywhere, in every discipline) there are forms of insight yielded by every form of blindness (and vice versa). So one plows on as best one can. Ultimately, what is

²“White” refers here, and elsewhere it appears, to the William Alanson White Institute in New York City.

naggingly insoluble, for me, is what I say in a sentence tucked away on page 14: “while I keep trying to think, from every possible angle, of the presupposition of the social and historical neutrality of the psychoanalytic situation, I find that I keep saying to myself: dangerous, far too dangerous.” The felt dilemma is real. But I don’t even have an adequately formed set of questions—much less the beginnings of an answering plan—to my sense of the inadequate development of what I would call the political project of psychoanalysis. In my view, the emergence of the Relational school, the developments that you and Mitchell and a number of specific others among your crew brought to the fore, and your own very particular work on dissociation—all of this helped open wide the door to—among many other things—better and better versions of more socially and politically (“lefty”) theory and practice, from the 1970s through today. I know that you are neither directly responsible for nor always in accord with this aspect of your legacy. But all of these postwar sea changes are not without their subtle mutually strengthening connections and unintended collaborative powers. As William Blake intimates somewhere: “Opposition is true friendship.” In other words, it’s often in the collisions, right?

So, I hope others won’t think my essay occupies **too** ungainly a place in this issue. I’m certainly very curious to see what the other contributors have written.

Yours, Max

APRIL 16, 2013

Max, your reply to my response is warming, generous, challenging, and anything but “ungainly.” Collectively, the people who write the essays about my work are not likely to turn this Special Issue of CP into a “let me count the ways I love Bromberg” that will be not only insulting but boring. I was not surprised that you said you knew I would “get it.” You know me well. And I know you do.

Even though I have not seen several of the other pieces, yet I am pretty sure that yours will command the most interest, most respect, and will be most remembered—by analysts, patients, and a variety of other human types.

One niggle. You refer here to your comment on p. 14: “while I keep trying to think, from every possible angle, of the presupposition of the social and historical neutrality of the psychoanalytic situation, I find that I keep saying to myself: *dangerous, far too dangerous.*” The phrase that

I put in boldface (dangerous, far too dangerous) is the one and only thing in your essay that troubles me. Even though a careful reader will know you are referring to the *social and historical* neutrality of the psychoanalytic situation, it can easily be read by a less observant reader as if you were saying that my approach to clinical work troubles you personally because, as a patient, it feels too dangerous. I know that you are NOT saying this. In fact the major part of your essay is a tribute to my allowing the Baker Street Irregulars to all be there. But the word “dangerous” is too “dangerously” appealing to those analysts who feel that my “irregularity” is itself dangerous because it violates the canons of classical analytic technique, and some will inevitably gloss over your meaning and substitute their own. I would be delighted if you were willing to substitute another expression, but if you prefer to leave it in, I will have no problem with that choice.

One last thing. We have a dinner date pending. I have not contacted you because I felt it would be tacky on my part to do that before you finished your essay. But now I can, so here I am. What do you say, my friend?

Philip

MAY 20, 2013

Dear Philip,

Apologies for the slowness of my reply! And belated thanks for the “niggle”; I revisited the phrase and found a better alternative.

Since submitting the final draft, I’ve been scrambling to catch up with other deadlines and forestall new ones as the last weeks and months of my sabbatical seem to slip through my fingers. My own treatment protocols, as well, are undergoing significant shifts; as my psychopharmacologist titrates me up on Parnate, it seems to be having a beneficial effect. And on the “talk” front, I’ve decided to see my analyst twice, rather than three times, per week, with the intention of terminating. I’ve been seeing him (first as therapist, then as analyst) for more than twelve years, and as I approach my 50s, I’m more and more determined . . . well, simply to “do other things.” It’s more complicated than that, of course. But the question of whether or not to terminate has been an explicit topic of conversation between me and my analyst for so long (several years)—chiefly, I think, because I had it lodged in my head that there was, ultimately, a “correct” answer to the question, and that I had not only to know for certain what it was but also to be able to articulate it in a detailed and clinically persuasive way. Now, I feel quite differently: frankly, I don’t think the question

really *has* an answer; or, rather, that, to the question “Why are you leaving analysis?” it is perfectly appropriate and sane to say, “Because I don’t want to do it anymore.” I *can* say more about this decision, of course. But I no longer feel the *obligation* to do so, and the relative absence of feelings of conflict about this seem to support this logic.

Still, a big change. Huge. Here’s to cracking life open, yeah? And hoping for the best.

Dinner! I don’t know if I ever mentioned to you that I adopted a shelter dog last November. He’s really splendid—but he, like so many shelter dogs, has acute separation anxiety. We’re working to overcome this, but it’s a very slow process (where have I heard that before?), and it limits pretty considerably my range of activity—especially when it comes to going out of town. As he becomes more and more able to tolerate my leaving him alone or with others, it will be possible once again to plan for our long-postponed dinner. In the meantime, I hope you are enjoying the advent of summer in New York at least as much as I am enjoying it here in Philadelphia.

Here’s my Robbie among the daffydowndillies:



Yours, Max

FEBRUARY 14, 2014

Dear Philip,

I had a sudden thought of you today. How overdetermined that must be. And yet the content of the thought, if one can ever speak of such a thing, eludes me.

I suppose, after all, it is in the broad context of affection and its relation to the avuncular.

I hope you are well.

Because it's a day of tokens, I'll share this link to a video, shot yesterday, of my dog Robbie showing us all what "leaps and bounds" might mean (you might recall that, in November, it was a real question as to whether he would ever walk again): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tonQhg2Aank>

Yours, Max

FEBRUARY 15, 2014

Dear Max,

I am, as I have been for a long time, grateful for your friendship, and also thrilled and warmed by your unanticipated *acknowledgement* of it. I am well (more or less)—meaning that my health feels stable though not what I wish it were. I know that this description is woe-fully impersonal, but that is because of my deep reluctance to talk in detail about my health, not because I feel impersonal toward you. In fact, I enjoy your description our mutual affection as "avuncular." Your talent for saying much between the lines (or in a single word) has always reached me in a deep way. The fact that you referred to Valentine's Day as "a day of tokens," and sharing your video of *Robbie's* open capacity for "leaps and bounds," did not fail to bring me warmth.

I cannot view the YouTube video, however, without signing-into Google Plus, which I cannot bring myself to do no matter what price I have to pay for my refusal. If there is a way you can get me access to the video *other* than through Google Plus, please, please, do that. I would really love to see him not only walking again but leaping and bounding.

Yours, Philip

February 15, 2014

Dear Philip,

Ah! I know something of what you feel about these social network sites. Evil necessities, in my world.

I've just tried to make access to the video "public," which will perhaps make it viewable by non-Google Plus vassals. If not, I will try to think of another way. (It's the size of the file that is the problem: it's too large to send via conventional e-mail.)

And, of course, should you be unable to see it, you will hardly have missed a triumph of cinematic intention! Just what one used to call a home movie.

You've allowed me to infer that you presently have some health concerns. I hope, at a minimum, that you can avoid any negative effects of the current miserable weather. God may love us. Other people may love us. But the earth definitely does not love us. "It will freeze a man like an apple," Emerson reminds us.

I don't know if you care much for popular films. But I recently re-screened Kubrick's *The Shining*, which is such a brilliantly crude fantasia on the super-ego, among other things. The final shot of the father, lost and abandoned, by the son he seeks to murder, in a snow-laden arboreal maze, frozen to death, with eyes (as Kubrick would say) wide shut...well, that image bestows a wickedly wonderful moment of gratification upon a broken boy like me.

I think the pendulum of psychoanalytic inquiry needs to swing back a bit toward anger. If only because there's so much of it everywhere one looks, especially when one looks within. Eros, yes. Thanatos, yes. But let's not forget Lyssa.

Does illness make you angry? (Perhaps less than intrusive questions!)

Yours, Max

FEBRUARY 15, 2014

Max, like all Luddites, my fear is not that of being a vassal but of being consumed by something so alien to my experience of reality that it threatens annihilation of my selfhood more than that of my cherished beliefs. The piece in today's *NY Times* simply added to it—essentially saying that Google doesn't care if you ever *return* to Google Plus once you signed on the first time. Just *one* time gives them the ability to trace you *thereafter* without your knowledge—and they will do so, compiling a continually updated profile of you to sell to others. But as I said, this

only added to what I already feel, so I subscribe to almost nothing. Note the word “almost.” I have probably already subscribed inadvertently to something that has consumed me (like Amazon.com) and by now am simply a piece of food being fought over. Even so, I am going to cling to my perhaps futile effort to go down fighting.

I have never posted anything on YouTube in the past. I have only accessed it as a viewer when I wanted to watch something a friend has recommended. Now I may never be able to do *that* again. I hope I am wrong, and that you will find a way to make your video available to me by public access, but you don’t sound hopeful. Home movie or not, I would love to see it. In my own world, such sites are not evil *necessities*—they are just evil. Many of my colleagues (mostly *younger* colleagues) do consider them necessities and some even believe that they represent an inclusiveness that justifies abandoning the “old” definition of invasion of privacy. Who knows? Maybe they are right.

My health has been forcing me to take better care of myself, which is probably a good thing. And I am doing my best to not see the unreality and even cruel transformation in climate as evidence that the earth—or God—is punishing us. Al Gore’s NY *Times* book review didn’t support my effort to avoid the slide into a doomsday state of mind, but so far I have succeeded.

I am not immune to Lyssa, but I feel that kind of rage damages me much more than it serves me. My model for how to not let it take you over is C. S. Lewis. In different ways, *The Screwtape Letters* and *A Grief Observed* are therapeutic textbooks without being at all boring. But what can I say? I also am inspired by the boy in *The Shining*!!!!

Yours, Philip

MARCH 23, 2015

Dear Philip,

Maggie said she mentioned to you that she recently visited my class on “Literatures of Psychoanalysis.” The focus that day was on creativity, so I assigned some Winnicott, and also your “Nearness of You” essay, along with some of Maggie’s writings (including some Suzy Zeus poems). Maggie was terrific, needless to say. And your essay was an obvious choice (and not just because of the opportunity it offered me for self-aggrandizement!)—for the point of the course is to illustrate the vital, mutually constitutive relation between literature and psychoanalysis—to show the students that these aren’t

just two separate disciplines with things in common, but rather co-extensive projects in the work of knowing, not-knowing, and sort-of-knowing.

I'm also glad to report that we've succeeded in establishing an official Minor in Psychoanalytic Studies here at Penn. As you may know, Penn—thanks to the powerful influence of its medical school and the nature of its Psychology and Psychiatry departments—is heavily oriented toward CBT and pharmacology. So, the very word “psychoanalysis” is seldom uttered, and, when it is uttered, it's usually in a context of caricature and dismissal. To my knowledge, there are very few such undergraduate programs in Psychoanalytic Studies at U.S. colleges and universities, so it's especially gratifying that we've been able to launch one here at Penn.

I regret it's been so long since we've been in touch. I hope you're feeling and doing well. You may know that your colleague Cleonie White has very graciously invited me to give a talk as part of next year's White Institute Colloquium series. (Indeed, I imagine I have you to thank for the invitation.) I expect I will deliver something characteristically idiosyncratic, if not entirely loopy, but I do hope that I will have the chance to see you then, if not before.

Warm regards, Max

MARCH 24, 2015

Dear Max,

Hearing from you makes me so happy. I wanted to write to you earlier to express my pleasure about your forthcoming talk at White, but kept myself from doing it because but even though we have a personal relationship it felt a bit too much like a breach of professional etiquette since the invitation comes from Cleonie. I may have played a minor part (with enthusiasm) but *her* great enthusiasm with regard to you being in the program is her own.

Yes, Maggie had told me about her visit to your “Literatures of Psychoanalysis” class. I was more than a bit envious. Suzy Zeus and DWW taught by Cavitch. What a gift to the students. To think about having one's mind exposed to such a blend of unharnessed (not idiosyncratic) creativity made the saliva drip from the corners of my mouth. In addition to the educational power of this course it sounds like everyone must be having a great time participating in it. Thank you for including “Nearness.”

About the establishment of an official Minor in Psychoanalytic Studies at Penn, I am excited and impressed. Even though I don't have first-hand knowledge of *academic* politics, it sounds like an achievement that must have required both wisdom and horse-trading. But most of all I believe that a good part of the reason it happened at Penn is because *you* have been changing the image of psychoanalysis and they were willing to take the chance you are accurate even if they remain skeptical about the generic identity of the product.

We indeed will see each other at White. Do you think I would miss a chance *both* to be with you and hear you in action?

With much warmth, Philip

AUGUST 31, 2015

Dear Philip,

It's been a while. I hope you are well. Things are OK here in Philadelphia.

I'm hoping you might answer a question for me—a question based on your work. I'm finishing a draft of my new book, which, generally speaking, takes a psychoanalytic approach to literary history. In my Preface, I cite a passage from your essay, "The Nearness of You." Here is the quote, in context:

With Bromberg, I stipulate a transferential relationship between writers and readers. Bromberg casts this relationship in theoretical terms as "self-state borrowing," which "manifests itself within and between a reader and an author . . . when the affective interplay among their self-states allows the affective interplay among your own self states to join theirs."

The skeptic will ask: How would you know? What about the fantasy that you are joining? Is this simply to say that history emerges somewhere between the two interlocutors? Can one speak of a phenomenology of response on the part of a writer, particularly a dead writer, who is by definition incapable, in his profound absence, of any sort of conventional response that could be triggered by and known by the reader?

How might you address such a skeptical response to what you claim? I'm very much in sympathy with your claim—it chimes with my experience of reading. But it's a tough thing to argue—especially to an

audience that isn't necessarily psychoanalytical oriented (or is so only in a classical sense).

All my best, Max

AUGUST 31, 2015

Dear Max,

As always, it is wonderful to get an email from you. And as always it is wonderful to revisit my awareness that *our* minds are connected in a non-empirical way that we both accept as *happening*, but with regard to which, I more than you, accept the word "uncanny" as a satisfactory explanation. How's that for a horrible sentence construction?

I'm well, and I'm delighted to know that you are too, if I can take "OK here in Philadelphia" as meaning *well*.

To account for my enigmatic opening paragraph, I can only say that your timing in sharing your internal struggle with the skeptics if you use the passage from my essay, "The Nearness of You," in your new book (CONGRATULATIONS!), is uncanny.

I spent the larger part of my summer "vacation" trying to write an invited book chapter which, when I accepted the offer, I believed would be *easy* to write, but turned out to be so *personally* difficult that I came close to rescinding my acceptance. The *details* are not needed in order to talk about you and me. The uncanniness is that the questions your "skeptics" are asking me about are questions I have never taken seriously in my writing because I don't give a damn about the skeptics. I consider myself a writer of *essays* rather than a *scholarly* writer. This lets me express my own perspective without having to include reference to the "skeptics" other than those I choose to. Suddenly, I was confronted with having to write a chapter in a book that had a preselected topic of its own. It was a topic that, at first glance, seemed so natural for me to write about that I failed to realize I had agreed to write a scholarly paper about a *topic*, rather an essay about my own perspective. It wasn't that the topic was beyond me. My essays have *always* included critics, but only on my own terms. Suddenly I was paralyzed. Concepts like "The Nearness of You" now have to be included in a piece of writing that will be a chapter in a book that represents many *other* positions, some of which would ask the same questions that your own critics are asking me.

The outcome was that I wrote the chapter. I finished it. I wrote it in the way I wanted to write it. And I'm about to send it to the Editor of

the book. The chapter is a full expression of what I believe. So, when I got your email, I said to myself “Thank you Max.” Your concern about *not* having answers to those questions is the same concern that, unconsciously, was interfering with my writing. But the fact that the timing of your email was so unbelievably perfect, made me more than ever accept without empirical evidence that “uncanny” is fine just as it is. Author and Reader? Sure. Why not? “Permeability of Boundaries” isn’t good enough for the skeptics? Maybe one day it will be. If not, I did my best.

As my father once (or many times) said to me, “A friend like this doesn’t grow on trees.”

With love, Philip

JANUARY 1, 2016

Dear Max,

About a month ago when Cleonie [White] told me that you withdrew from doing the WAWPS³ Colloquium because of illness I was concerned but also befuddled. The befuddlement was not because I doubted your reason but that it felt strange you didn’t let me know also. So, I wondered if there were more to it than illness, and whether the “more” was personal. Whether or not my intuition has some reality to it, what I feel most bad about is that I reacted to my fantasy as though you would not want to hear from me if I wrote to you of my concern about your illness and the depression it has caused.

Why am I writing *now*? Since it is New Year’s Day, maybe it has something to do with “new beginnings” but I don’t think it’s only that. Our relationship means a lot to me and I have behaved badly toward it and toward you. I hope you will accept my apology and accept the genuineness of my wish to know how you are doing. You appeared in my life in a way that was joyously unanticipated. You are now part of it, and if you must withdraw from *us* (as well as the Colloquium), there is no way I’m going to just sit around and simply let it happen. I still have the photo of Robbie that you sent me in 2013, so when I heard the topic of your Colloquium my hope was that I would get to see not only you but get to meet Robbie in person.

³“WAWPS” refers to the William Alanson White Psychoanalytic Society of the William Alanson White Institute.

By the way, in the same email that contained the photo of Robbie you told me that you planned to stop seeing your therapist/analyst and ended with “*a big change. Huge. Here’s to cracking life open, yeah? And hoping for the best.*” I thought I’d mention it in case you forgot.

Anyway, as you can see, you are not the only one in our relationship with a “thin skin.” Please write to me.

With much affection, Philip

JANUARY 1, 2016

Dear Philip,

I’m glad that the first thing I’m doing in the new year is being in touch with you—even though it’s occasioned by certain levels of distress on both sides. I was very disappointed and embarrassed at having to cancel my seminar. I gather Cleonie told you that, as I explained to her, I’ve been stuck in one of the worst, and most prolonged, depressive episodes I’ve had in a very long time.

It began sometime in 2014 and has persisted ever since. In the middle of it, in May 2015, my sweet Robbie died.

As you know, depression kills one’s ability to relate to—or even to imagine—the rest of the world as anything but a terrifying, hostile, rejecting—or, at the very best, an indifferent—place. “Reaching out” becomes as difficult as reaching in.

I’ve resumed psychotherapy, and I continue to experiment with the voodoo of psychopharmacology. My doctor and I were seriously considering ECT, but I grew scared of the potential for serious memory-loss. So, we will continue to try other drugs, even though I’ve already been through much of the pharmacopeia. I think next week we will try the synthetic opioid buprenorphine (do you have any depressed patients on this drug, and, if so, do you have any insights into its efficacy?).

I wish I could believe in “new beginnings.” But thank you, so much, for writing today, for being an emissary of hopefulness. I hope you are well and thriving.

Your friend, Max

JANUARY 1, 2016

Dear Max,

Yes, I am well. “Thriving” is always a tough call to make. But even when I include aging and its physical companions in the equation, I would say probably more yes than no. Sometimes, however, I wonder if the biggest part of what makes me lean toward “no” is that, at my age, more and more friends are seriously ill or have died.

I probably needed the above to use as a segue into what has been taking place in the life of my friend Max, because I had a reaction that was full of different feelings all at the same time. I too am glad that the first thing you did in the new year was to be in touch with me. I’m glad and grateful.

Hearing that your sweet Robbie died was close to unbearable for me, so much so I could hardly get myself to enter the place in me that could feel what it must have been like for you. But I did. I’m so sorry, my friend!

Since you didn’t mention anything about my fantasy about why I didn’t hear from you, and your letter is so open-hearted and genuine, I’ve put that to rest. The distress now being felt on *my* side is about what you are going through and *have been* going through.

I am not an M.D. and I know next to nothing about meds. You also shared with me that you have been seeing your doctor for a fairly long time, and I have no reason to assume he is anything but a highly competent professional. That said, when I read what you wrote in your description of “depression”—“*As you know, depression kills one’s ability to relate to—or even to imagine—the rest of the world as anything but a terrifying, hostile, rejecting—or, at the very best, an indifferent—place*” I began to worry. That is not the way I would describe a symptom of depression.

But, Max, it is the precise way I would describe one of the most frequent aftermaths of trauma—particularly early trauma that involves an experience of loss that compromises an infant’s emerging sense of *selfhood* at a time that normal development requires the existence of an indelible bond—an experience of oneness between self and other that the infant takes with him as he gradually and safely emerges into a safe world of otherness that is *not* perfect. If this state is shattered, the world “out there” becomes some version of what you described. Healing, however, is not only possible, but highly likely if it involves a therapist who recognizes and works with it. The only part of the diagnosis of *depression* with which I *slightly* agree is your

saying that “Reaching out” becomes as difficult as reaching in.” But even that, is most likely due to *shame*—the most powerful aspect of being saddled with the aftermath of threatened destabilization of self.

One last thing. As I said, I know almost nothing about meds, and the only thing I know about buprenorphine is its use in getting someone off an opioid. I’m sure it must have some history of use in treating depression or your doctor wouldn’t be considering it, but if the diagnosis of depression is something you feel is worth reconsidering, then perhaps that medication should be put on hold.

Here’s the thing I still must ask. For all I know, you have already tried seeing a therapist (or therapists) who approached the work with you from a perspective such as I have described, which would mean that what I said is not news to you, and perhaps has already been tried by you without seeing benefit. If so let me know. If such is the case, I still stick by what I wrote, because I truly believe that efficacy in working with trauma and dissociation has to do with the person—and people are not all alike.

Let me know how all this sounds.

Your friend, Philip

JANUARY 1, 2016

Dear Philip,

Having reached middle-age (I’m 52), I have myself begun to experience certain aspects of “aging and its physical companions”—not the nicest of companions, to be sure. And while I’m not old enough to have experienced the illness and death of so many in my generational cohort, I have—in a very different way—experienced the loss of others, inasmuch as my illness (whatever the right term for it) causes me to withdraw from others and/or push them away, creating a condition of profound isolation and loneliness that may be akin to what one feels later in life due to the loss of one’s peers. The huge difference is that I live as if I myself were dead.

I wish I understood better the relation between the archaic trauma you describe and the way I feel in the present. My psychotherapist is, for the most part, a “here-and-now,” relational sort of guy. I’m not sure what he would say in response to what you’ve written below. I’m not sure if he would fit the picture of the kind of therapist/analyst you’ve sketched. I’ve always resisted seeing someone else—chiefly

because it's scary and hard to find someone new. But if you know (of) someone in Philadelphia who fits this picture well, do pass along their name, and perhaps I would go for a consultation-visit.

As for medication: yes, who knows? It's all so dubious. Grasping at straws. But apparently buprenorphine has produced good results in people with "treatment-resistant" depression.

Perversely, perhaps, I wish I weren't what they call "high-functioning"—that is, able, for the most part, to (joylessly, and with supreme effort) get the necessary things done. Part of me envies the people who simply and totally break down. I think it's mostly the fantasy of being taken care of—which is strong, strong, strong with me ... and goes back to the archaic, of course. As does, in its way, my incessant, inconsolable grief for Robbie. My last words to him were "Take me with you," and I meant them, still do.

I'm sorry to heap you with all of this. You hear enough tales of woe from your patients. Maybe that's one of the reasons I didn't write to you when I wrote to Cleonie. I'm sorry my silence made you feel bad.

Yours, Max

JANUARY 2, 2016

Dear Max,

Yes, I do understand. You are 52, you have built a successful career (in spite of all else). You are, as you put it, "high functioning." So why the hell should you want to risk messing with that as long as you can continue to keep the wolf from the door? I have no answer to that. If I were in your shoes, I might well feel the same. Seeing someone *new* does risk messing with the status quo. You have just gone through a brutal period of time and may well be emerging from it already—at least enough to feel that having *your* guy to take care of you, even if he didn't prevent what just happened, is too good to risk messing with in order to take another route that might leave you worse than before.

One reason you didn't mention that you have not switched therapists is that your guy *has* helped you, and it is also quite possible that he can help you even more. You clearly have a solid relationship, and from what you write it sounds like he is open-minded. *My suggestion is that you share with him what I wrote and ask what he thinks about*

it. If my intuition is right, it will not fall on deaf ears, and could even make the process of therapy more robust in new ways.

You write: “I live as if I myself were dead.” You speak to the “fantasy of being taken care of—which is strong, strong, strong with me.” You *have* that with him, and you don’t need to give it up. I get the feeling that when you are *with* him you do not feel dead inside, but the potential exists for you to *build* upon that. How? By adding something additional of your own *to* that relationship rather than looking for someone else. If you act on what I put in boldface in the previous paragraph, that could be a start—but it requires that you speak to him from the place in MAX that has the authority to build a *career* on his own terms and is now participating in the therapy the same way. He won’t stop being there to take care of you because he thinks you don’t need it anymore. But *you* will bring to a relationship with someone who takes care of you, a part of yourself whose time has come to expand.

Warmly, Philip

JANUARY 7, 2016

Dear Philip,

I did share with my therapist [...] what you wrote, and he certainly agrees with what you say about early trauma. I think both he and I see less of a discontinuity between such early trauma and its sequelae, on the one hand, and my experience of depression, on the other hand. But it is a complex relation to be explored, in any case.

I thought I’d try to mitigate the gloominess of our recent exchange with a question about our shared love of literature and its relation to psychoanalysis. For my spring course, “Literatures of Psychoanalysis,” I’m trying to find a short story (or a **short** novel) that I could use in my class that would thematize/perform **discontinuity** of self. It doesn’t have to be—I’d prefer that it not be—something that directly thematizes psychoanalysis as such. But something that would help us talk about the various ways in which self-continuity and stable identity and the notion of the self’s integrity across time (the lifespan) are things to question, to think about as constructed, as “necessary fictions,” if you will. I’m thinking of having them bring in pictures of themselves as babies and talking about what it means to “recognize” your “self” in such a photo. This would be a kind of prep for reading the kind of literary work

I'm asking you about. So, not a story of traumatic DID. But, rather, a story that illuminates the more commonly experienced tension between the need to think of oneself as an integrated, continuous self and the harder-to-recognize/accept condition of self-division/discontinuity.

Any suggestions?

Also, I thought I'd share with you one of my favorite photos of Robbie. I call it (with nods to Benjamin and Bollas) "The Shadow of the Other":



Yours, Max

JANUARY 10, 2016

Hi Max,

First of all, I want to tell you how moved I still am to have this photo of Robbie in the "Shadow of the Other." I love this Robbie so much that I find it hard to accept that the "Robbie" who shadows him is really part of him. Hard to accept, but not impossible. I found myself wondering if this photo was done specifically for your planned presentation at WAWI⁴. But that's old business, so I won't ask further.

I don't think [...] and I know one another personally but I do recognize his name. I'm glad to hear what you wrote, and I hope that my input contributes something helpful, but as I said in my earlier email, I believe that for *you*, further healing and growth depends not on what *be*

⁴"WAWI" refers to the William Alanson White Institute.

believes or doesn't believe but on how *you* engage him from now on that enlists him as *more* than someone who takes care of you. In other words, whether you leave him or stay with him may not matter at all. Either way, if you settle for someone whose role is to love the child in you, and will lovingly try to take care of him while you continue to see that same child as nothing but a weakness—a part of you that is a pain in your ass because you are so ashamed of him that he feels thrown away by and hated by the family that really matters—the *inner* family of Max. That's all I am going to say about it, Max. To say more, would come too close to "therapizing" rather than trying to help you better use being a patient.

Now to your Spring course, "Literatures of Psychoanalysis." I appreciate being asked to participate and I've given some thought to what I might suggest as "a story that illuminates the more commonly experienced tension between the need to think of oneself as an integrated, continuous self and the harder-to-recognize/accept condition of self-division/discontinuity." I am afraid I can't come up with what you need. Short stories do not have enough presence in my reading life to provide a context from which to select. I can, however, recommend a relatively short 2003 book by Ross Feld titled *Guston in Time: Remembering Philip Guston*. It was cover-blurbed as "Part criticism, part memoir, part meditation on art and death." A perhaps odd choice. maybe not. Could be worth checking out. The format is primarily *actual correspondence* between Feld and Guston.

In addition, if you are not averse to assigning a novel, I would recommend (also 2003) *Out Stealing Horses* by Per Petterson. One of my favorite novels, which I would never have read if it hadn't been a gift from a Norwegian friend.

Sorry for my limited selection, but I'm not apologizing for the *foundational* appropriateness of either choice.

Warmly, Philip

January 10, 2016

Dear Philip,

I think you've mentioned *Out Stealing Horses* before [...]. I guess I'd better read it!

This picture, taken about a year before he died, struck me as emblematic of the strange combination of knowing and not knowing that dogs have with themselves and that we have with them. Robbie was so **like** me, in various ways. And yet he was also so "other." He

so clearly had consciousness and memory and emotion—yet so differently from us.

Robbie's death has cast a very dark shadow over my life. I've never grieved like this for a human loss—which might say something (to speak in a pedestrian way) about my disorders of attachment, but which also says something pretty distinct about human-canine relationships. It's also the first death that's made me fantasize heavily about life-after-death—something in which I do not believe, but which part of me now feels devoted to. When I asked Robbie, as he was dying, to take me with him, it wasn't only my suicidality expressing itself; it was also the fantasy of actually going *with him*, somewhere. In her beautiful essay on the death of one's dog, Vicki Hearne imagines that her dog will “hunt free with Orion and roll among the stars.” I want that with Robbie; and I'm sure it's not just/only a death-wish.

Oy. I hope I don't turn into a mystic—or, worse, a Christian.

Yours, Max

JANUARY 10, 2016

I too am sure that what you asked Robbie as he was dying is not simply a death wish. “Sure” isn't even emphatic enough.

If you read *Out Stealing Horses* and don't see how it would work well for you, I don't believe you will feel it was a waste of time.

One comment about your last sentence, “Oy. I hope I don't turn into a mystic—or, worse, a Christian.”

The challenge is to expand selfhood without “turning into” something. You must remain Max. And to do that, embrace whatever feels meaningful to you but make sure you discuss it with *all* parts of Max.

Warmly, Philip

APRIL 5, 2016

Dear Philip,

I'm hoping to be able to attend the New School event on the 14th (things got bad enough in January that I'm on medical leave this semester, and my situation is still pretty unstable).

In the meantime, I thought you might get a kick out this article about our new undergraduate program in Psychoanalytic Studies here at Penn:

Hoping to see you soon, Max

APRIL 5, 2016

Dear Max,

This email brought back my memory of the photo of you wearing a t-shirt reading “THOUGH DEAD HE LIVETH.”

I also thought about the words you wrote in your January 7th email about your “incessant, inconsolable grief for Robbie. My last words to him were ‘Take me with you,’ and I meant them, still do.” I’m sort of glad I didn’t remember those words while I was wondering why you stopped writing to me. If I had, I probably would have become your worst nightmare—intrusively invading your isolation with my feeble efforts to keep you from doing what I would have been sure you were planning to do.

But it seems that the words on the t-shirt speak more accurately than the words in your January email, and is what our correspondence was actually about before you disappeared from view. Remember? I was trying very hard to steer you toward a way of using yourself in therapy that would change the words on the t-shirt to THOUGH DEAD “HE LIVETH.”

Anyway, Max, I’m so sorry that you had to go through such agony. I’m truly sorry I didn’t know and wasn’t able at least to try even if I screwed it up. But I’m also so happy that you are back in touch despite your situation feeling still unstable. The prospect of being able to see you next week at the New School event brings me great joy. But because registration is now closed, please email Jeremy Safran [...] and explain that you originally had been a scheduled speaker who had to withdraw because of illness but are now feeling well enough to at least attend, and that Philip wants you to have a seat in the reserved section. Max, I know you well enough to figure that you would prefer to hide somewhere in the unreserved seating but in fact that might be more difficult because it has a waiting list. So do what I ask, unless you already know that when you write “I’m hoping to be able to attend” you’re giving yourself permission to change your mind at the last moment if you find yourself in a state of mind you don’t want to be seen in. If that freedom is in your mind, then don’t ask for a reserved seat but email Jeremy anyway and after telling him who you are, ask to be officially registered in the general seating. Be sure to let him know that your being there is something that matters to me a lot.

That's all for the moment except for my delight about the new undergraduate program in Psychoanalytic Studies at Penn. You, my dear friend, generate creative energy at such a high level that those around you can't believe they found you and never want you to leave them. Yes, I do understand that this very thing can sometimes elevate your wish to hide, but what the hell—"Hello, I must be going."

Much warmth and a hope/shout that you keep corresponding with me—and that you appear in living color on April 14th. I'm attaching a recent flyer for you to look at. As you will see, the address of the event has changed.

Philip

April 6, 2016

Dear Philip,

Thank you for remembering these things—two things so closely connected and yet so radically opposed: that photo, taken on one of the happiest days of my life, the perfect summer day when Maggie and I attended a free Patti Smith concert in Battery Park; and that wish, uttered on one of the worst days of my life, when I killed the dog of my heart.

Suicidality is such a complex thing: a wish to escape life (suffering) and a wish, not to die, but to escape **into** life.

When one has been among the living-dead (the severely depressed) for so long, the whole world feels like a vast sepulcher. One longs for a "world elsewhere." A world with Robbie in it, for example, where he "hunts free with Orion and rolls among the stars." Finally, in middle-age, I start to understand why so many people believe (or struggle to believe) in an afterlife.

But there are those other "parts" of me that endure, and that emerge from time-to-time: the parts that are ambitious, sensuous, optimistic, vain, desiring, sociable, etc. They have an awfully hard time, however, finding their way into my days. And nothing is more frustrating than trying to figure out (and do something about) what are the endogamous and what are the exogamous causes of one's misery. Drugs and talk, talk and drugs.

I will write to Jeremy Safran (and cc you). Thanks for facilitating my attendance (I thought I had registered, but perhaps I forgot, or thought I'd do so closer to event)—I think there's a very good chance I'll be able to attend. So, I'll look forward to seeing you next week!

Yours, Max

[*There followed an email exchange with Jeremy Safran, who extremely graciously found a seat for me at the April 14, 2016 event. PB wrote on April 11 to say: "If they hadn't found one for you I was planning on giving you mine. Much looking forward to seeing you soon."*]

April 14, 2016

Dear Philip,

I'm so, so sorry, but I can't make it tonight. Things have been very bad again since yesterday, and the trip to New York is just too much to contemplate. It was foolish of me to count on being able to handle it. Apologies to Jeremy for the trouble he went to. And apologies, again, to you, for being so unfit for something that should be such a pleasure. I hope it is a great pleasure for you.

Yours, Max

APRIL 14, 2016

Sad news, Max. But I think it would be more appropriate if you contact Jeremy and tell him yourself.

Best, Philip

APRIL 19, 2016

Dear Max,

This is to apologize for the curtness of my tone. I was more disappointed than I anticipated because I fully believed you would be there and tried to minimize my hurt with detachment from you.

I have no doubt that you truly were feeling too sick to attend, and I am sorry if I made you feel bad because you are someone I love and do not want to hurt because of my own difficulty with feeling "overly" vulnerable.

I think you would have enjoyed most of it had you been able to be there, and I am now sad, not angry or hurt, that you had to miss out on the *shared* pleasure that the event generated in everyone.

Anyway, Max, I hope your health is already progressing toward restoration and that you will be in the mood to write to me before too long. I miss you.

Love, Philip

APRIL 19, 2016

Thanks, Philip. But don't worry: I know how consequential my own self-states can be for others (you taught me that!). It **is** frustrating,

disappointing, maddening, etc. *to have a relationship with someone who is depressed*. My illness can be toxic to others, even as it poisons me.

I heard that it was a fine evening. Were you pleased? I imagine it's a strange sort of situation to be in, no matter how delightfully it flows.

Much love, Max

APRIL 19, 2016

Max, you need to expand the part I underlined in boldface. The words "illness" and "toxic" are missing the point. My disappointment is because I love you and wanted to see you and wanted to share the moment with you regardless of whether you were formally a speaker. It is our relationship that it is all about, and it is one which is and remains a gift to me. Times of disappointment are inevitable in such a relationship, and for me, they are not toxic. This time was the first occasion I have experienced it with you, and my wish to see you was so strong that my degree of disappointment was equal to it because my vulnerability was greatest. The terms "toxic" and "illness" make it impersonal and I'm not going to sign on for reducing it to that.

It was indeed a fine evening, and I was thrilled and moved beyond anything I dreamed was possible. I too had for a while been afraid the situation would feel strange, but as the day approached, I more and more knew I would be fully present—and that's what happened. I became fully emotionally involved with the people who wanted to give me so much of themselves, and my own gratitude and theirs became a single experience that made the evening more than an "event." It is not definable by any term I know. But it continues to exist for me.

Love and respect, Philip

APRIL 19, 2016

Well, I suppose this is what I project—or imagine I'm projecting. That is, that my anhedonia, fatigue, evacuation of interest, loss of symbolic/articulatory power, short-temperedness, etc. (so many symptoms, or self-sates, are involved in depression, as you know) are "caught" by others. And, at the very least, that my frequent inability to function—to follow-through on plans, for example—is disappointing/frustrating to others (not unreasonably). So, that's what I meant. Often, it's the things that matter most that I'm unable to do. I had to cancel dinner

plans the other night with a lovely friend. And I recently (on purpose, more or less) slept through a phone call from another very dear and supportive friend. So, I don't want to make it sound impersonal; I don't think it is. Indeed, I think it's tied up very closely with the strongest positive feelings, which can feel overwhelming in the midst of a depressive cycle. Then again, another devastating feature of this illness is that it's so difficult to understand what is happening to oneself—both because it's a complex illness and because it robs one of so many faculties of thought and imagination.

I'm VERY glad that your experience of the evening was so happy. And I do wish I'd been able to be there to enjoy it with you. Maggie took it upon herself to be a kind of proxy, it seems sitting in the chair reserved for me, and invoking my name in her remarks. That was very sweet of her. Her friendship is something we're both very lucky to share—and which inevitably, I suppose, inflects our own friendship. You have such a wonderful group of people in your life, and *I'm very glad and grateful to be one of them.*

[unsigned]

April 19, 2016

Thank you, Max. You just made it easier for me to see it from your point of view, which is not difficult to understand once you went into detail and has an added benefit of helping me be a *little* less preachy in my belief that I know the *truer* truth.

Best, Philip

P.S. I agree that I have a wonderful group of people in my life—and I too am very glad and grateful that you are one of them. A very special one of them.

[On April 29, 2016, I emailed PB to tell him about a never-to-be-completed essay-collection I'd begun putting together, titled "Slow Burn: Patients' Perspectives on the Political in Psychoanalytic Treatment." Over the following months, we had an exchange that proved politics was not the ideal space for us to share!]

NOVEMBER 12, 2016

Dear Max,

We haven't been in touch since April, and I apologize. Yeah, I know I was the last one to write [*briefly, on April 30, 2016*] but that's

irrelevant. I enlisted it as a stupid “justification” for not writing *again*, telling myself that you “preferred” it that way.

What’s making me write at this particular moment is mainly that after the election results, I can’t *bear* our silence any longer. Our relationship cannot be allowed to die a “natural death.” If it *ever* must die, it’s ending must be as “irregular” as it’s beginning.

I also had a “justification,” but serving the opposite purpose of the one above. It gave me a concrete reason to write *now* without waiting any longer. I heard about the racist activity that was uncovered taking place at Penn and I immediately thought about you, about whether it had begun to also include the LGBT community and, if so, what a horror the whole thing would be for you—not only personally, but for the foundation of what you stand for.

But besides that, I miss you—a lot. I hope you are not physically suffering so much that it is making you want to give up. My hunch is no! I am not writing as a “rescue” attempt. Our relationship doesn’t need rescuing. It needs reactivation.

So here I am.

Love, Philip

NOVEMBER 12, 2016

Dear Philip,

So many obstacles, so much misunderstanding: a.k.a., life. But you (my Philip object, if you’ll permit me the formulation) were never gone—though I’m so happy to hear from the “actual” Philip, from all the Philips you happen to be today!

Not least among the obstacles is all the absurd “busy-ness” (i.e., the inessential, usually bureaucratic, immensely time-consuming tasks that our professional worlds impose upon us, but which have little or nothing to do either with the substance of our work or with the efficiency or quality of our institutions).

For me, struggling, still, with illness (though no longer on medical leave), even the essential tasks are twice as hard and take twice as long. And, worse yet, one of the symptoms of depression (as you well know) is a powerful tendency to withdraw and to fear the world and to lose the capacity/wherewithal to maintain even the simplest of social connections.

I still feel very bad about having had to miss your spring symposium, especially after you and others made such exceptional

accommodations for me to attend. No doubt you felt hurt and angry and had every right to—even though I also know you understood full-well the imminent danger I was facing at that time.

And now the world around us—already so broken and dangerous (so “poorly made,” as the French say)—has become a playground for what W. H. Auden (in his beautiful elegy for Freud) call’s Hate’s “dingy clientele.” As you mentioned below, Penn and other universities have been made a particular kind of target for Hate’s minions. Who knows how it will play out in the months and years to come? Perhaps, if we’re lucky (!), it will be another period—like the Reagan/Thatcher years, or the Bush II years—of global misery and woe from which at least partial recovery will be possible. But it’s not implausible that we’re facing Armageddon. Just imagine if Trump is able to follow through on his plans to eviscerate the U.S.’s relation to NATO: if that happens, then the slightest spark on the Korean Peninsula could lead to war between North Korea and South Korea, which would immediately suck in China, Japan, Russia, and the E.U., and, eventually, the U.S. as well. In other words, World War III.

And, in the best-case scenario, the misery and death of many Americans will be the direct consequence of this wholesale, far-right takeover of the entire Executive and Legislative branches of government (and perhaps the Judiciary as well—we’ll see).

It is certainly not a time to feel bad about our own ordinary human foibles and lapses, real or imagined.

We have an odd friendship, you and I, by which I mean chiefly that it has developed largely through private correspondence and professional publications. But oddity is no flaw, no devaluation, no inherent limitation. And, for me at least, periods of non-contact do not have to mean attenuation—and certainly not “death”! I like the fact that we always seem to be able to pick up more or less where we left off—whether it’s a day later or months later. That said, it would be nice to see you sometime. I wonder, for example, if there are any upcoming events at William White (or perhaps at the upcoming APsaA meeting) that you will be attending. Let me know if that’s the case. I’m very seldom in New York, but it has been known to happen!

And Philip: there are little bits of good news amidst the horror:

For example, I’m delighted to report that Routledge has offered a contract for my edited volume of essays on psychoanalysis and

politics; better still, Don Stern wants it for his special Routledge series. Of course, the contributors now have to write their proposed essays, and we have to make them all good enough for publication—but everyone now has this strong incentive to do so.

Also, this coming Monday, Maggie will be visiting my undergraduate class on “Literatures of Psychoanalysis”—readings to include ... Philip Bromberg, of course!

What is your news? Are you feeling well? Are you engaged in something that helps mitigate the sorrow and fear of the new world order? [*I wrote to PB on January 25, 2017, letting him know that, for the fall 2017 semester, I was to be the next Erikson Scholar at the Austen Riggs Center.*]

January 27, 2017

It is a nifty bog, isn't it? And there are at least two folks there—Marilyn Charles and Jane Tillman—who specialize in the psychoanalytic treatment of the psychoses (along with Charles's substantial work on the relation between psychoanalysis and literature), which will make them especially helpful to my work on this book of mine.

The one infelicitous thing: they don't allow dogs! I haven't yet adopted another one (Robbie still haunts me too much), but I was hoping to be ready to do so at the beginning of this summer. Yet, at the very least, I could kennel a new dog nearby, while I'm in residence at their “cottage.”

But really: no dogs? Have they not heard of the many advantages of dog-assisted psychotherapies? Perhaps this is what I will end up educating them about!

How are *you*? Will you be participating in any events at White, or elsewhere, in the coming months?

—Max

JANUARY 29, 2017

Two very good people! The Center is very lucky to have you, and I hope you get as much from the experience as they do. Your putting the word “cottage” in quotes is a relief to me because it suggests you know that the personality of the Institution (sort of like my own) tends to “sit on two pots with one behind” when it comes to elitism and inclusivity—and that you (as I already know) will deal with it

magnificently. I might even wonder if your discussion of me in context of the “Irregulars” might be apt.

Just in case, it might be fun to be accompanied by a new dog, and also to watch how they respond to the thinly concealed irony of your kenneling him in a place known for its openness. Forgive my mischievousness. I can’t help it. In fact, I like the place a lot.

As to me, I’m by and large, doing well. At the moment, I’ve been devoting my professional participation to writing the paper I will be presenting at the Division 39⁵ Conference this April, where I will be honored by the Division with an Award. I did not mention in my email of April 8th that the Award is for Psychoanalytic Scholarship. (Pause for your hilarious laughter—not laughter of disbelief, but of shared uncanniness—given how our relationship came into being around your healing me of the residue of trauma that remained from my *earlier* encounter with the word “scholarship.”) My presentation and the Award will take place on Friday April 28th from 11:00AM to 1:00PM, and if you want to take a look at the blurb, the full 2017 Div. 39 program is online and open to access by anyone who wants to see it.

Other than that, I have ideas for a few other things I am looking forward to working on in late Spring and Summer, but I am in no rush. It feels very good these days to have more relaxation in my schedule and still be productive.

It is grand to be in contact again, and especially to sense that the hauntedness around your loss of Robbie has not too badly harmed your wish to live with passion—including toward writing your book.

Your loving friend, Philip

JANUARY 31, 2017

Hi Max,

It would be a treasured moment for me if you were present. My gratitude would be beyond words—and as you will discover if you indeed are there, *the talk I gratefully plan to give* as part of my accepting this award for scholarship will too be beyond words (*if* I have the courage to risk *repeating* the “We don’t do that here” experience from which you helped me heal). At one level I will be *publicly* expanding

⁵“Division 39,” and elsewhere it appears, is the Psychoanalytic Division of the American Psychoanalytic Association.

the context of the word “scholarship” to *intrinsically* embrace what is what for many in this field is still *unacceptable* because its *experiential* basis is not containable within a model of reality that depends on rationality. If I do have the courage, it is not in arguing for my *belief*, but in sharing my personal experience. I am not yet sure about how far I will go. “Uncannily,” however, a few others have suddenly emerged who are writing about the same thing, one of whom has a paper in press that draws upon my writing extensively, and which I will most likely quote from (while trying to not sound too insecure in so doing).

I love your use of the word “unconventional” in describing some of the elements you plan to include in your new book. My own work has *always* been unconventional, because it has challenged “conventional” psychoanalysis to abandon its time-honored commitment to seeing what is *experiential* in clinical process— as a means to an end—the “end” being an inevitable reduction of the non-rational to a temporarily necessary adjunct in achieving rationality (similar to what they have done with the “real relationship” between analyst and patient). My courage will be required not because I’m arguing for an opposing *idea*—but for my willingness to use some of my own non-rational experience as evidence. At my age, the risk is increased by the temptation of others to see it as brain deterioration at a cognitive level: -)

Whew!!! The closer it gets to April, the more enticing four months in pastoral Stockbridge sounds. Maybe a bit of envy?

If you do attend, please, please, sit near the front. And also get there as early as you can so you can come up and let me know you are there. In case you are moved: -) to make a comment when audience participation is opened, I want to be sure I can see you from the stage so as to make certain the moderator knows to look for your raised hand. Yes, I know I’m trying to pressure you.

Your loving friend, Philip

JANUARY 31, 2017

I’m very glad to know about your Div39 lecture and award! Because it’s on a Friday, I might well be able to attend. (I’m sure my own analyst will be there, so why shouldn’t I?) Your books and articles are such a marvelous trove of genuine scholarship—a word I interpret quite broadly, ecumenically if you will. My own new book (the one I’ll be finishing at ARC) includes some very unconventional elements,

inspired largely by Françoise Davoine (herself a former Erikson Scholar!), perhaps the greatest (and most eccentric) contemporary writer on the psychoses.

The idea of a “cottage” (their word for it) is actually quite attractive to me. I’m a Massachusetts boy, after all—and western Massachusetts is so lovely and non-urban (there’s much of the country mouse in me: a self-state that hasn’t been nurtured nearly enough in my largely urban-centered life). Four months in Stockbridge—especially the fall months, before the cold sets in—will be a welcome pastoral sojourn!

I’ll be looking forward to the possibility of seeing you in April!

Yours, Max

FEBRUARY 1, 2017

Yes, indeed. What you say: “My own work has *always* been unconventional, because it has challenged ‘conventional’ psychoanalysis to abandon its time-honored commitment to seeing what is *experiential* in clinical process as a means to an end—the ‘end’ being an inevitable reduction of the non-rational to a temporarily necessary adjunct in achieving rationality (similar to what they have done with the ‘real relationship’ between analyst and patient).” This is one reason why I called that little essay of mine, about you and me, “Irregulars.”

-In my published writing—especially my [*Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*] article on gender-variant children and suicide—where, often, my target is the imperative on “adjustment.” (Martin Luther King, Jr., has some brilliant words on the need to be, and to value being, mal-adjusted to the world.)

-In my treatment: my (very relational) analyst’s insistence on the “reality” of our relationship and, thus, his difficulty 1) coping with the (my) irrational/impersonal, and 2) *joining* me in, or at least getting into it with, my most appalling and dangerous self-states.

I think you should stick to your guns and give the talk you want to give. We so rarely get the chance to speak our (wildest) truths—or to hear others do so, for that matter. This is, I think, one of the reasons why I’m writing a book about a delusional psychotic poet—and why I am “unconventionally” (i.e., in a less than strictly “scholarly” way) speaking *with* him, rather than more simply “about him.” (And this is why Françoise Davoine’s wild works—not only the book on trauma

and history she wrote with her husband, but, more crucially, her own more recent books on folly, madness, and her own failures. Have you read her books *Mother Folly* and *Fighting Melancholia*? Her (gentle) Lacanianism seems to me no barrier at all to generative resonance with your own work. And she is so richly, smartly literary!)

—M

February 2, 2017

You give me courage. And you give me hope. I so wish you to be there. Whether or not you choose to speak, our journey continues.

Thank you, Philip

[There ensued a long exchange with PB, involving various other people as well, about my possible attendance at the award ceremony for PB on April 28, 2017, at the Division 39 meeting in New York. Complications, awkwardness. But I was able to attend. It turned out to be the last time PB and I would be together in person.]

April 29, 2017

Dear Philip,

Congratulations, again, on your richly deserved award for *scholarship*!

I enjoyed your talk, and I particularly enjoyed your recitation of Bishop's "In the Waiting Room"—well done!

I'm so glad that, like Sigmund Freud, I am your friend.

oxox, Max

APRIL 30, 2017

Dear Max,

I'm sure that by now you know that Sigmund Freud is my friend only because of his mind. I wish I had known him when he was alive because it wouldn't have surprised me if we had become friends personally. You, my Dear Friend Max, have been *more* alive to me than just about anyone in my life, and I feel our friendship as *totally* personal even though we have not met "personally" except for a few occasions. Your mind is surely how I first got to know you, but it isn't the reason we are *both* glad we are friends. Love seems to be about *people*. I've never been able to find the words to capture it but I know it when I feel it.

We both know that isn't only your mind "that particularly enjoyed my recitation of Bishop's poem," any more than it was just *my* mind that loved knowing you could feel what I was feeling as I spoke the words. That you enjoyed my talk means a lot to me. And that I know you enjoyed it being *me* you are congratulating is what makes our *friendship our* friendship —just as I feel such joy in what is taking place currently in both your *career* and how much you are looking forward to just *being* at Riggs.

Thank you, Max, for wanting to be with *me* on Friday.

oxox, Philip

April 30, 2017

Dear Philip,

So much of my work—all of it, really, in one way or another—has been about the "liveness" of the dead. I take seriously what you and others have said about the intersubjectivity of the relation between writer and reader. Indeed, that's what's at the heart of the book I'm hoping to finish while at Austen Riggs.

Of course, that doesn't mean that I think there is no difference between the living and the dead. The living body makes something distinctive of the mind. I'm so glad I could be fully *present*—in your presence—on Friday. Yet Bishop and Freud and Ammons were present also, in their different ways.

By the way, do you know the Ammons poem called "Easter Morning"? I think you would like it, so, in case you don't know it, I'll attach a link to it here [*which I did*].

Living on, Max

MAY 1, 2017

Thank you, Max. You are right about my liking "Easter Morning." And also, your own penetrating voice: "The living body makes something distinctive of the mind."

I too am glad you could be fully 'present' in my presence, and I in yours.

Yes, here's to living on,

Philip

[*This isn't the end, but it feels like the right place to stop.*]

Editors' notes

The following provides references for many of the books, poems, articles, etc. discussed in this email exchange and identified in the text by roman numerals. References with title, date, and author clearly listed within the exchange are not included here. In addition, for readers who might be unfamiliar, we have defined some acronyms or “shortcuts” within the text that refer to organizations.

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