Supplementary Letters 1960–1975

This PDF is one of a series designed to assist scholars in their research on Isaiah Berlin, and the subjects in which he was interested.

The series will make digitally available both selected published items and edited transcripts of unpublished material.

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Supplementary Letters 1960–1975

Most of these letters do not appear in Building: Letters 1960–1975 (B), being later discoveries. More annotation may be provided later, but for now the texts are made available here for the convenience of readers. Sources are given at the end of letters. Abbreviations and other editorial apparatus mostly follow the conventions adopted in the published volume, or those listed here.

Several (asterisked) letters from the published volume are also included, in three cases because only carbon copies were available to the editors; since then top copies have come to light in the New York Public Library, which houses the bulk of the New York Review of Books archive, and manuscript additions and alterations made by Berlin are shown here in this red. A fourth letter (19 March 1970) appears because the Jewish Quarterly published it in May 2021 (see sources at the end of this supplement), adding the passages cut in B. Three letters to Jean Floud are included (one not previously published, two from B with some cuts restored) to give a fuller picture of her and IB’s discussion of Robert Skidelsky’s book on Mosley than there was space for in the published volume. Passages restored in letters from Building and some corrections are shown in this blue.

The four published volumes include for the most part only letters written by Berlin, but where we have the other side of the correspondence, and have been able to secure the necessary copyright permission, the online supplements will also include a selection of letters written to Berlin, chosen for their interest and the light they throw on the context of the exchanges. At present the only example in this supplement is the letter from George Kennan of September 1966.

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Letter from George Kennan © Princeton University 2021

‘A Fire at Harvard’ © Kay J. Lisle 2019

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TO JOHN SPARROW

30 September 1960

Headington House

My dear Warden,

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours, with much love

Isaiah
TO EDWARD WEEKS

25 April 1961 [manuscript]

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

Dear Ted

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

I cannot, alas, “do” Ben Gurion. I do not know him well enough: I disagree with him too often; I admire & think him terrible and splendid, but, like de Gaulle (whom he much resembles in dwelling with heroes of the past very vividly & seeing himself in dramatized historical perspective) he is not someone I can successfully describe. Churchill I didn't know at all; so that was just a review, another matter. B. G. – if at all, only posthumously, for reasons you will well understand – if then: but perhaps not at all. I wish I could tell you about Israeli culture; I know so little of it, I am ashamed to say. Yakov Talmon¹ of Jerusalem University (a historian known in U.S. for his book on Totalitarian Democracy) could tell you; or a nice man called Ephraim Broido who edits a highbrow periodical in Tel Aviv (the Israel cultural attaché – surely there is one – in Washington wd forward a letter: I haven't his address). he is much the most reliable intellectual “consultant”.

Till May!

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Isaiah

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

TO DAVID CARVER

6 October 1961

Headington House

Dear Carver,

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

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

I do not myself believe that anything done to expose Surkov will help Madame I. – I think they have made up their minds about that and Surkov is merely reproducing a carefully officially prepared line to which they all stick. He may, being an exceedingly clever man, have helped to work out the official version, but once it is adopted it ceases to be his property, and his personal fate has little to do with the fate of the victims. The only thing which could save them would be a change of heart on the part of some person

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

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

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah Berlin

TO DAVID CARVER
12 October 1961
Headington House

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

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah Berlin

A FIRE AT HARVARD

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

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

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

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

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

TO GEORGE KENNAN

n.d. [mid-October 1963; manuscript] The Reform Club
As fr. Headington House

Dear George

How are you? How is your family? I had to come to London
to-day & could not go to your first lecture, but I’ll be there on
Thursday. Wd you like a) to telephone & make a date for a peaceful
rencontre b) come to lunch on Saturday 26\(^{th}\) with Annalisa\(^6\) (without
the Warden of Wadham: he was very obstreperous: but he
 clamoured to meet you: & indeed perhaps gave you pleasure.) c)
dine in All Souls on Nov 3 (Sunday)\(^7\) when Ld Halifax demands to
meet you: & you can see my colleagues exhausted after a private
feast the night before.

No need to answer: if you would just ring: we have to lunch
with Pasternak’s sisters who live in Oxford on Thursday so I shan’t
hang about much after your lecture. I do hope you are well. I hope
to have communicated some guilt – spontaneously as he realized –
to the Master of Balliol about your economic condition.

Love

Isaiah

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\(^5\) Email of 9 January 2019 to Henry Hardy.

\(^6\) Kennan’s Norwegian wife Annelise Sørenson Kennan (1910–2008). IB
gives her name in one than one version, not including the correct one.

\(^7\) During the period in question 3 November was a Sunday only in 1963 (and
26 October was a Saturday).
TO ROBERT SILVERS

2 June 1964

Dear Mr Silvers,

First let me say that I enjoyed meeting you a very great deal, and am very sorry that we should be divided by an ocean; that, according to Richard Wollheim, you will be coming here in August, when I shall be in Italy, and I shall therefore have no prospect of seeing you again for some time. If you and I and Richard could dine together we should, I think, spend an exceedingly satisfactory evening – indeed, any two of us would I think do so, but I could wish that we could all meet. Will you be here after September? I shall be at Stanford for two days on 5 October and then will have to fly straight back home – I shall return to the United States at the end of March next year.

Secondly, all hope is not yet gone that I may yet write something about Stuart Hughes. I have now finished his very short book and he does say a number of things which are sufficiently provocative to deserve comment. I will try and write something in the summer – July or August. Perhaps I shall fail: if so, I shall let you know. I hear that Miss Mary McCarthy thinks that the Times Literary review of Miss Arendt’s notorious work was written by ‘a lawyer who had failed in politics, and obviously a Jew’: I am, I suppose, not at liberty to reveal the name of the author: but if he is a lawyer he is so only marginally, he has never been in politics, and is very, very far from being a Jew – so much for our old friend’s perspicacity. Did you read it? It was an interesting piece and rose above the polemics of the Partisan Review. One must, I suppose, not ignore such squabbles: if one thinks of the level at which the early associates of Marx, and indeed, the Master himself, wrote against each other, that was pretty squalid too; and yet the consequences, whatever one might think of their value, were not negligible. Still,

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8 John Sparrow.
it seems extraordinary to me that mere obscurantism and desire to cause pain should get anyone so far, but perhaps I am not right about this.

At any rate, I wish we could meet again soon.

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah Berlin

TO ROBERT SILVERS

13 July 1964

Dear Mr Silvers,

It was very nice to hear from you and I really shall attempt to produce something apropos of Stuart Hughes, and on the other book which you were kind enough to send me. I have just completed an enormous review for the Political Quarterly – too long for them to print probably – on Macpherson’s book on Hobbes; and as he is a fanatical Marxist and has replied to all his other reviewers – except those who praise him without qualification – with the greatest vehemence and violence, I tremble. However, the review is written, the sword drawn, and I must do something more peaceful and academic for a while. But I really shall try and produce something for you. All that you say about the Partisan Review and the enormous past history of scores to settle, stabs and counter-stabs, and memories of who joined the Party when, and why and when they left it, and with whom and for whom, and who displayed what cowardice in what crisis, and what betrayals there were, etc. is, in general outlines, familiar to me. I realise that the whole thing was simply the occasion for the outburst of long-accumulated resentments, and that the main subject of Miss Arendt’s book was buried underneath all this. And I am exceedingly amused by the thought that the TLS review was written by Hampshire and myself, jointly. I do not know Mr Lionel Abel: but if you see him, you can assure him on the best authority that neither Hampshire nor I
wrote a word of it, nor knew that it was to appear; although by dint of careful enquiry I have discovered who the author is, naturally after having had to take oaths of the most fearful sacredness not to reveal his name (it is a man). He is, in case anyone wishes to know, remote from all the persons concerned, remote from Nazis, Jews, political theorists, the intelligentsia — it was an original and imaginative move on the part of the editor to send this particular book to him — and what he wrote came from his inner consciousness, influenced by, so far as I know, nobody: the author is the most independent human being known to me: this is the only clue which I am allowed to give. Mary McCarthy — (how could she think, or anyone else, that either Stuart Hampshire or I would describe her as ‘the egregious Miss McCarthy’) — told the editor of the TLS that she supposed it to be a Jewish lawyer disappointed in politics. Nothing can be further from the truth. There has been a very arid correspondence about all this, I gather, in the TLS as to what was meant by ‘the darkest hour’ for the Jews. I am sure Miss Arendt imagines herself as a kind of Rahel Varnhagen and the first-class row boiling round her as a kind of great romantic collision between Schiller and Goethe and Schlegel and Hegel, etc. It has been a fearfully squalid personal imbroglio and the central issues of the whole thing — for I suppose there were some — have been buried under very dreary personal insults and counter-insults. I cannot bear to answer reviewers, even when they are insulting and mendacious. I am sure that Mary McCarthy, let alone Miss Arendt, would have been better off if they hadn’t. It really would be nice if we could meet again soon. You will not be coming to England before I come to the United States in April? I hope that you will.

Dictated but not signed by Isaiah Berlin
P[at] U[techin]
Dear George,

You say that your letter calls for no reply: but indeed it does. And I was overjoyed – I mean this as literally as such words warrant – to receive it. On all grounds: because any word from you establishes an area of private relationship and speaks directly, at least to me (and “private faces in public places are wiser and nicer than public faces in private places” as Auden once wrote) – and I am very pleased and grateful by your still continuing belief in my “feel” for Russian life and culture (I suppose it was a culture?), when I have done so little about it for so long. But believe me – believe me I beg – what delighted me far more than even this – egoist as I am & with some natural vanity, surely, – is your desire to return to our old love. Do not abandon her! I feel like Turgenev when he begged Tolstoy to return to literature – so ill received by T[olstoy] who cared for nothing but moral regeneration and despised Turgenev to boot – but you won’t take it so. I still think, & indeed feel deeply & absolutely convinced that you could write an immortal masterpiece on the Russian Revolution, which (a) deserves it (b) cries out for it. Here is the event which altered our entire world & us especially: half a century has passed: At a similar remove from the French Revolution – what had not already been written for & against & more or less objectively too: Mignet, Guizot, Louis Blanc, Lamartine, the beginning of Michelet & lots of others – & we? Only chapters in popular histories – one or two learned & serious essays – memoirs – W. H. Chamberlain & – Carr; and now Conor Cruise O’Brien – who is a far better writer than Carr or Deutscher but passionately engagé, will do something to it too. I believe in objective truth: I believe that when we say that Halévy or Klyuchevsky are truthful and dependable historians whereas a Pokrovsky or Belloc or the leader writers of Voprosy Istorii are not, we mean something which would be intelligible to
any educated man, say, since the Renaissance. The Russian revolution & its antecedents — (of course you are right — no Russian history without literature is thinkable: it should not be, of any country: but in the Russian case, this is very obvious) is an Andromeda surrounded by dragons, chained to some appalling rocks, in need of a Perseus: the Gorgon’s head is to have lived in & retained vivid recollections of the Soviet Onion: this + understanding what, say, Dvoryanskoye Gnyezdo, Byesy,⁹ The Cherry Orchard are about (any fool knows what Fathers & Sons or Gorky is about) are the sine quibus non: & your other gifts — I don’t mind if I do make you blush — are unique in the world: literary, intellectual, moral, political: nobody in the western world — apart from Russians who are pro tanto hopeless at this — can detect, as you can, ‘Toot Russky Dookh:¹⁰ ‘Toot Roos’yoo pakhnet’ in patterns of events, books, men, lives & acts & forms of self-expression. Well then! Wohlauf!¹¹ Not a day, week, year spent on this would be wasted. God knows I am in a somewhat analogous boat — tied down as I am by my official chair at Oxford, I must do my other stuff: but I shall never be happy, like all the unfortunates injected by this unique nostalgic affection, until I return to Belinsky & Co. And your ‘mission’ — das Angegebene — is, because of your marvellous attributes & temper, correspondingly greater. So there! Dixi et salvavi animam meam.

That the revolutionaries, cadets and all, madden you, I understand. Especially the noble S.R.s: But to live under an old, hated despotism — loathed by the world & filled with self-hatred & a very squalid and transparent self deception or just lies, is not like any western life either: When we meet — I hope very soon indeed — would you remind me to tell you, if you haven’t heard it,

⁹ *A Nest of Gentlefolk* (Turgenev), *The Devils* (Dostoevsky)

¹⁰ ‘Тут Русский Дух, Тут Русью пахнет’ (‘Here is the Russian spirit, here is the smell of Russia’), a slight misquotation of ‘Там русской дух … там Русью пахнет!’ (‘There is the Russian spirit … there is the smell of Russia!’), line 41 of Pushkin’s poem ‘Ruslan and Lyudmila’ (1840). Cf. B 10.

¹¹ ‘All right!’
Karpovich’s story of the priest’s revolutionary son: & Dostoevsky’s sentiments recorded in Suvorin’s journal circa 1881: I am sure you remember it: when he dreams he overhears a conspiratorial conversation & wonders why it would be regarded as monstrous to tell the police. I shall try to defend the silly old intelligentsia to you: Pipes, e.g., has got them very wrong: your great uncle grasped this better: they were superficial about what was to be done: & the manipulation of human lives: but he speaks of the uniquely horrible revelations about the crime & idiocy of fanatical monism in politics and morals: if so fantastically acute an observer as Tolstoy could think the solution so simple, the situation needs some explaining: I do look forward to talking about all this (I am very ignorant of the nineties).

As to Princeton: the grimmer, the bleaker, the darker, the better for me: for I have an awful lot of work to do, & Oxford is too soft & undermining. That Harvard is uglier but has intellectually more “useful” people – for you or indeed me too – is true. For me it is (after conferring incredible favours on me & doing an enormous lot for me) too competitive: people are too sharp: too self-improving, too unable not to look over their shoulders to see how fast X or Y is getting on with their “stuff”: too ambitious: industriously ambitious: unbogus: unstuffy: but puffing and panting all the same: & so far as the Russia in 19th century is concerned (why do I so hate the 20th?) not so terribly good either: still, I do see what you mean: frequent visits, full intellectual utilization – but to live there – hear the whirring – no! do let’s talk about that too. Oh dear! I am terrified (what arrogance to put it that way! Tolstoy was offended with Turgenev, even Lord Snow, who is an ignoramus and a Philistine, gives his letter, idiotically – as an example of “magnanimity”) that you will be tempted into public life: in which your position, morally & personally, is, again, like all else about yourself, if you don’t mind my saying so, unique. Don’t let the sirens capture you! You really could – can – transform the West’s image (horrible word) of itself by adducing true facts and unanswerable interpretations.
Enough. My handwriting alone is too terrible to cause you to be subjected to this torture & logorrhoea any longer. I apologize. I arrive, I hope, on the 17th September. On the 21st arrives Aline & we move to 57 College Road West: in between times, 4 days, I shall stay at the Princeton Inn, if they have a room: & try to find out what I am expected to do. I am always nervous of new experiences: my self confidence is a minus quantity: unlike the S.R.s.

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Isaiah

Love to Anna Lisa. We do look forward …

The next letter is badly typed and somewhat garbled: IB’s corrections are inadequate, but the sense is clear enough.

TO ROBERT SILVERS

12 October 1965

Headington House

Dear Bob,

Thank you very much for the memoir of Mandelstamm and the letter of translation. I have the book on his prose which is written by a professor here whom I know – I know him and his work and it is a good book.

I ought not to be allowed to write about poetry. Everyone knows I know nothing about it. Still, something ought to be done about ‘acquainting the public’ with this exquisite, beautiful, severely disciplined, very undecadent master – on the contrast, a writer with a kind of Landorian ideal of life in part and his dreadful fate with the trial of his friends, persecution of the dictator, and

12 The Russian name transliterates in the system we use as ‘Mandel’shtam’ (the form used in Henry Hardy’s editions of IB’s works), but is usually spelt ‘Mandelstam’ by English writers. It is variously spelt by IB and/or his typists ‘Mandelstam’, ‘Mandelstamm’ (the original German form) or ‘Mandelshtam’. In 1980 IB and RS differed about how to spell the name in IB’s memoir of meetings with Russian writers, settling on ‘Mandelstam’.
diseased torture hounding in the camp, sordid and dreadful death, ought to be commemorated. So I will do my best. The person who really ought to do it is, I suspect, Maurice Bowra, who will be quite annoyed at my doing it, or, indeed, touching on the province of Russian poetry at all; although I did once do a small piece on Pasternak for *Partisan Review* years and years ago of which I am not entirely ashamed. The Lowe translations look all right. Unromanticised in the wording sometimes, but I must look at the originals.

Anyway I can do nothing before I deliver those horrible New York Columbia lectures, and then I have to go to Europe for a week. During the European journey I shall scribble something and send it to you.

The philosophy anthology is much more tricky. It is a perfectly worthy enterprise, but under the wrong label. It is as if an [anthology of] American philosophy [...] appeared containing works by Jonathan Edwards, Washington Irving, extracts from Melville, Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, Henry James, Channing, Niebuhr, Paul Elmer More, winding up with a statement about American pragmatism by an unknown professor from the

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13 Evidently a garbled transcription, though the sense is more or less clear. IB appears to be saying that the public should be made aware of Mandel'shtam and his remarkable qualities, and of the contrast between his liberal ideals (reminiscent to some degree of those of Walter Savage Landor) and the dreadful fate he suffered: his friends were put on trial, and he himself was persecuted by Stalin; he was sent to a prison camp, where he was hounded by his jailers, suffered torture and disease, and met a sordid and horrible death.


16 *Russian Philosophy*, ed. James M. Edie, James P. Scanlan and Mary-Barbara Zeldin, with the collaboration of George L. Kline (Chicago, 1965), 3 vols. IB dictated a 2,500-word review, of which a very imperfect transcript survives in his papers. He corrected barely more than the first tenth. The transcript is available online as ‘Russian ‘Philosophy’’. 
University of Kansas. Some of the pieces might be quite interesting, some written by gifted essayists, critics and theologians, but philosophy? There did exist academic Russian philosophers: one or two are reproduced here – I ought to have added Santayana and Ralph Barton Petty – but it wasn’t much good. Dutch academic philosophy, and Portuguese and Swiss, exists too, but an anthology would not be of absorbing interest. This the authors haven’t done; they have done the other. They have simply taken bits and pieces from ‘penseurs’ – who are none the poorer for it. […]

Meanwhile, when are we to meet? Why don’t you come here? November would be best, when I am back from Johns Hopkins, i.e. the second week of that month. Do suggest yourself. Stuart (whom you will have seen yesterday) and I will welcome you with [the] greatest warmth, as you know, and Aline17 too. I daren’t speak about Mrs H.18

Yours,
Isaiah

TO VERA STERN

22 October 1965
Princeton University

Dearest Vera,

Thank you very much indeed. On the very next night Madame V. and Rostropovich appeared at Princeton in place of Miss De Los Angeles, who was indisposed in Europe. He played the piano, she sang. She appeared in the same splendid flaming red dress and sang some agreeable Tchaikovsky and some magnificent Mussorgsky (scored for a bass voice) – of all the sopranos in the

17 Aline Elisabeth Yvonne Berlin (1915–2014) née de Gunzbourg was married to IB from 1956 until his death in 1997.
18 Stuart Hampshire’s wife Renée, whom IB viewed considerably askance, describing her to Aline as ‘a monster’ (B 123/2).
world she holds a soprano which is emotionally nearer a bass than anyone else – is this an insult? Believe me, I do not wish to insult her – you think I am a little mean to her, but now our friendship is sealed by the fact that unexpectedly they saw me again – embracing – kisses – vows of eternal friendship – and I hope to see them again in New York, or at least him. Relations between them appear to me to be obscure.

But this is really a letter – forgive it being typed. If I hadn’t had it typed you wouldn’t have been able to read a single scribble, let alone word – to thank you for true friendship, true consideration, being so nice to us both, and in general, for being as and what you are. I must not go further for fear of awakening Isaac’s no doubt never wholly dormant jealousy – at least I hope it is not dormant – no doubt jealousy is a base emotion, but its death is a sad occurrence in anyone’s life surely – and to ask when you will be back again and when it is that we can meet again peacefully – after I have delivered my Columbia lectures next week, I shall be a new man, carefree, gay and with an unimpeded broad Russian soul. Unless you fear that this may grow to excess – which it may – please let me know here or at the Carlyle, but better here, for the Carlyle forwards very little, and usually to the wrong address.

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

Yours, with much love

Isaiah

TO ROBERT SILVERS

2 March 1966

Headington House

Dear Bob,

Goodness me – what a city you live in – the publicity given to my very routine arrangement with the City University of New York by which I come for three or four months – and not every year – seemed to me fantastic. I have seldom had a nastier week than that in which that odious vignette of my appearance, character, habits,
origins, appeared in the *New York Times*,\(^\text{19}\) plus an article by Alistair Cooke in the *Guardian*\(^\text{20}\) which, in the guise of jolly banter, and humour and agreeable chaff, was one of the most odious pieces ever written about anyone by anyone. I feel inclined – like my colleague Caute in All Souls – to rush into print with memories of Alistair Cooke’s broadcast in 1940,\(^\text{21}\) which he is certainly seeking to forget. But I shall do no such thing. I shall behave like Barzun,\(^\text{22}\) in a restrained, gentlemanly, severely Henry-Adams-like manner. What could have stimulated the *NYT*, of all newspapers, to this hideous exhibition of intolerable vulgarity? My letters are divided into genuine concern about my feelings (this pleases me very much, although it does not comfort me) and crocodile tears about the indignities to my person – and naive, sincere congratulations upon having attained such a measure of public appreciation. I find it difficult to answer the last without hurting feelings.

The Oxford Lowell affair was grotesque.\(^\text{23}\) No doubt these campaigns ought to be better organised, but there really was a rush of Philistine xenophobes to the polls, and Stephen Spender’s letter about the clergymen and cricketers brought out to vote for Blunden was not at all inaccurate. They will learn: Blunden is inaudible, has nothing to say, and despite his air of sweetness and Georgian innocence is a not very estimable character. I remember having a row with him, quite unexpectedly, in the early 1930s, when he displayed sympathies for Hitler – admittedly of a rather confused kind – because of a certain feeling that he and Hitler ultimately stood for the same rural values, were both front fighters in the war, and did not much like sophisticated intellectuals, Jews etc. in the corrupt centres of international culture. But I am very

\(^{19}\) Leonard Buder, ‘Sir Isaiah Berlin, Philosopher, to Join City University in Fall’, *New York Times*, 8 February 1966, 1.


\(^{21}\) Untraced.

\(^{22}\) Jacques Barzun (A 48/3).

\(^{23}\) Robert Lowell’s failure to be elected Oxford’s Professor of Poetry: see B 362/2.
sorry for Lowell: it is disagreeable to be defeated in these circumstances, and it is the fault of whoever in Oxford originally promoted his candidature. No doubt he can be elected later, and no doubt he will not wish to stand; whether a ‘draft’ is possible I simply do not know. I thought of writing to him, and then I thought I wouldn’t, for what would it have been possible to say? Only to say how awful it all was, and how silly, and how unimportant, but at the same time how discreditable.

The essay on Russian philosophy is still lingering in my mind. I have not abandoned it, although at the moment I cannot write anything, but it will reach you in the end. It will not come to you, alas, in March – I cannot do it then and I apologise humbly for this. You must ascribe it to a long fit of depression induced by the New York press, and the consequences of it in the British press. Never have I had to make a personal statement before, through the ‘wire agencies’. I felt like Sir Charles Dilke, and still do. In fact I am involved in hideous intrigues connected with the possibility of funding a new college more or less for scientists – once that comes to an end, I shall be free to write the article (and one on something else as well, I seem to remember).

Stuart wrote a marvellous piece on Wittgenstein for the New Statesman – his piece on Sade I did not admire so much, but do not tell him so. The piece on Wittgenstein is almost worth your reprinting. He seems to me in a melancholy state too. But you are not – you are living in the centre of things – and I do not mean this ironically – this truly is a backwater – I like backwaters, but perhaps an occasional small breeze to stir it would not be out of place.

I have received a letter from Norman Birnbaum telling me that Lichtheim has not landed his job at Essex after all. That depresses me. Everything depresses me at the moment, but with the capacity for ultimate optimism of our dear old race, I shall doubtless rise from this present mood. It will be very nice indeed to see you in

24 Meaning unclear: perhaps an election managed by enthusiasts without Lowell’s active participation.
New York. All kinds of old friends of yours came to a party given by Stephen to celebrate his silver wedding, his birthday, his son’s twenty-first, all simultaneously. The point of the party was not to invite Mel Lasky, which he successfully did. Weidenfeld, on the other hand, was there to underline this fact, and still the spectacle of elderly Labour and Conservative cabinet ministers, doing extraordinary contortions to the sound of what seemed to be tom-toms, did induce a vaguely pro-Soviet mood in me. I must repress this. You and I and Barzun and Hester must defend Western values. I shall do so at Cornell when Stuart, Conor Cruise O’Brien, Shils and Northrop Frye discuss scholarship and morals. You must come. Everything of this kind is at once grotesque, embarrassing, quite interesting, unnecessary, and ultimately not altogether discreditable to the human race.

Yours,

Isaiah

TO GEORGE KENNAN

21 March 1966

All Souls

Dear George,

Thank you ever so much for making me a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts And letters as well. It really is much more than my due. When I saw who the other persons elected were I was sure that, if there had been proper competition for this, I should have been properly blackballed. What you said – do you remember, in the hallway of your own house? – about the marvellous penetration and fearless honesty with which the members of this distinguished body rejected the unworthy, makes me feel that I am exceedingly lucky to have scraped in. Anyway, I am most grateful to you and to Arthur, and shall attempt to do nothing disgraceful, and to live up to a proper standard of intellectual and personal respectability. I wish I could say that my vanity was wholly unaffected by this: it
is not – I am delighted, and shall flush with genuine pleasure when the American Ambassador crowns me. It is much nicer, of course to receive more than one is due, but it seldom happens, and I owe it all, as much else – my entire American academic career, in fact – to you. It is too much to be put in words, or in anything else, so far as I can see. I had better stop before my feelings brim over too far.

Yours,

Isaiah Berlin per BJK [Baillie Knapheis].

FROM GEORGE KENNAN

2 September 1966

Hotel Regina, Venice

Dear Isaiah:

God knows when you will receive this letter, but it is not important when or where it arrives. I am moved to write it because I am, at long last, in the midst of M. Venturi’s grim and relentless book,25 and I am troubled, once again, by my failure to respond as Venturi certainly does, and as I suspect many of the rest of you do, to the annals of the Russian revolutionary movement of the XIX century. I wrote you once before along these lines. In doing so again, I do not mean to pursue anything like a controversy – merely to communicate a bewilderment and to invite the sort of understanding which you, with your Catholic sensitivity and perception, have never – to my knowledge – denied to any honestly-held view from any quarter.

Recognizing to the full the selflessness and strength of character and, if you will, personal purity of many of the Russian populists & S/R’s [Social Revolutionaries], I find them tiresome, philosophically childish for all their intricate philosophizing, repulsive in their savage intolerance, colourless, and

presumptuous. I feel for them the same sort of distaste that Gibbon experienced for the early Christian ascetics. Herzen commends himself to my sympathies primarily by the complexity of his relations with the opposite sex, and by contrast with what

rest of letter missing

TO MICHAEL MORAN

19 September 1966

Headington House

Dear Mr Moran,

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

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

I wonder if you know a book by Lovejoy – the last that he ever wrote – whose name I cannot remember. It mainly deals with Schelling, to whom he is of course not very sympathetic, but whom he treats with great scruple and fairness; he gives evidence of whole pages of Schelling copied out consciously or unconsciously by


27 Berlin is referring to Arthur O. Lovejoy’s The Reason, the Understanding, and Time (Baltimore, 1961).
Coleridge. Indeed I think there is literally nothing original in Coleridge’s basic views; what is original is the application – I think this is also your view – to a theory of poetry or art in general, in the particular way that he made it, and the ‘infusion’ of the personality of Coleridge himself – the quality of his own vivid self-expression and the authenticity and first-handedness of the whole thing, which is very different from some of the German theorists. But idea for idea, this can all, I think, be found more or less literally both in Schlegel and Schelling. ‘The Great I Am’ and the Primary Imagination, in different terms, are all there. Lovejoy stresses the importance of Jacobi, now almost utterly forgotten, but in his day, according to Lovejoy, more famous than anyone other than Kant. Certainly his theories of the intuition correspond almost precisely to certain strains in Coleridge. It is the Anglican parts, or, generally, the more Christian elements in Coleridge (although there are, of course, analogues among the Germans), that often are, it seems to me, fairly original; and you are quite right to emphasise all that, and certainly the notion of the clerisy – a kind of Saint-Simonism, of a very English sort, which is peculiar and unique.

The thing I was going to emphasise particularly, however, is this: should you not perhaps go a little more into the whole division of reason versus understanding – what you quite rightly call the laudatory as opposed to the pejorative names for the two ‘faculties’? I do not know where this begins, but from the beginning of roughly the second third of the eighteenth century the Germans begin to distinguish two faculties or methods or approaches or casts of mind – one analytic, scientific, tending towards the division of nature and everything else into uniform, artificial units, or pulverizing, deathly – bad; the other synthetic, creative, intuitive, organic, full of insight, delving into the essence of things, etc. etc. – good. This is certainly not Kant’s division of reason and understanding; but it is there in the Schlegels, in Schelling, in Fichte, in Hegel, in Maistre, and in a perverted form entered into a good deal of Nazi patter; ‘analytic’ as a term of abuse – as indeed it is more or less also used by Burke – with all its
aesthetic, ethical, political and theological implications, was certainly an important phase of European thought. French Catholic reactionaries by 1815 are full of it. Bergson is only the most eloquent, though not the clearest, expositor of it. I do not know of anyone else who, in English, has stated this so plainly. The difference between secondary imagination and fancy revolves around this, and so does every anti-positivist doctrine since that day.

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

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah Berlin

TO GEORGE KENNAN

30 October 1966 [manuscript]

Hotel Blackstone, 50 E 58th Street, New York

Dear George

How are you? I do hope, entirely well: it is very very nice & (very characteristic, if I may say so) to write to me as you have. I’d love to see you anywhere anywhen, as you know. I like New York (odd: but, I fear, true) but I loved Princeton to: & was very happy there. I cannot come on Jan 31st, for I shall, by then, be back in Oxford (we leave on Jan 10 approx.) But shd love to come on Dec. 9 at 12: thank you ever so much. I am sorry not to hear about Swift: the last commemoration of him I attended was in Moscow: in 1945: 200 years after his death: the speech was by Zaslavsky: it attacked the British Empire: were you there? I remember it vividly.

yrs
Isaiah
§ TO ROBERT SILVERS

26 June 1967

Headington House

Dear Bob,

Here is quite a decent piece by old Talm, with most of which I agree. I enjoyed I. F. Stone’s piece very much.\(^{28}\) I agreed with that too – perhaps he somewhat underplayed Nasser’s addiction to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which he did after all reprint in something like a million copies, and the work done by all those Nazis in Egypt – one might say that Arabs cannot be blamed for using every anti-Jewish weapon that they can find, given their state of mind, but the facts ought perhaps not to be concealed.\(^{29}\) Of course Stone is right, and the only hope for the Jews is Levantinisation, and not as an outpost of Western values, culture etc., which anyway only highly Westernised Jews, German, English, American etc. (not Russian or Polish) want them to be, and which they certainly will not be, and have no business to be. Edmund Wilson\(^{30}\) in all this, conversing with Agnon,\(^{31}\) must have been too enchanting and characteristic. As for the Jewish sociologists in New York, blowing out their chests and glorying in the fighting men of Israel, I can well imagine that this would irritate you or anyone else; the same persons did exactly the same with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade\(^{32}\) in Spain, or indeed any other uniform, whether Communist, National, American or Zionist, which produced fairy-story effects – transformed their rags into shining armour and healed their wounds, and made the flesh seem whole.

\(^{28}\) Isidor Feinstein (‘Izzy’) Stone (1907–89), left-wing US journalist and author.

\(^{29}\) Gamel Abdel Nasser (1918–70), second president of Egypt 1954–70.

\(^{30}\) Edmund Wilson (1895–1972), one of America’s leading literary critics during the mid twentieth century, and a regular contributor to the NYRB.

\(^{31}\) Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970), leading Israeli writer, awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1966.

\(^{32}\) During 1937, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade fought for the Spanish Republic against Franco’s forces in the Spanish Civil War.
It may be a vulgar and maddening phenomenon, but this is how slaves and liberated slaves behave, and it is in the end not a reason for not liberating them. It is what the whole ancient world felt about the Japanese victories in 1905, and what poor old Deutscher and many like him felt about Trotsky on his white horse and military uniform. Not to feel superior to this is not possible for you or me, and I expect I shall have to explain it patiently all to Stephen. Stuart will need no explanations. The really extraordinary phenomenon is France, with de Gaulle and the Communists on one side, Sartre on the other. Extraordinary.

Are you really not coming here? My desire to go to Russia in September is ebbing. Once in Italy I know I shan’t move, but don’t tell the Lowells just yet (perhaps). I think perhaps this is the moment to go – the forces of darkness are a little bit too much in the ascendant; Lord Snow and Sholokhov are on top, and the fate of the persecuted Jewish intellectuals is too painful. One cannot meet them, and if one does it will do them no good, and cause them to be denounced, however innocent their behaviour. Perhaps next year would be better.

Yours,

Isaiah

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33 The Russo-Japanese War, 1904–5, led to a series of humiliating defeats for the Russians and contributed to the 1905 Russian Revolution.
34 Isaac Deutscher (1907–67), a Polish Marxist journalist and historian, and Berlin had an acrimonious relationship, chronicled by David Caute in Isaac and Isaiah: The Covert Punishment of a Cold War Heretic (2013).
35 Stephen Spender (1909–95), Kt 1983, English poet, novelist and essayist, was a close friend of IB for many years.
36 Stuart Hampshire (1914–2004), Kt 1979, leading Oxford philosopher, close friend of IB since the 1930s.
37 Robert Lowell (1917–77), one of the leading American poets of the post-war period and a key figure in the founding of the NYRB, was married to Elizabeth Hardwick (1916–2007), a writer and regular contributor to the journal.
38 Charles Percy Snow (1905–80), Baron Snow 1964, British novelist and scientist whose Rede Lecture in 1959 initiated the ‘Two Cultures’ controversy.
39 Mikhail Aleksandrovich Sholokhov (1905–84), Soviet novelist and winner of the 1965 Nobel Prize in Literature.
TO ROBERT SILVERS

17 July 1967

Wolfson College

<What a screed! & on this writing paper! don’t read all this stuff until you have absolutely nothing else to do. Thank you for you Talmoniana & Tuchmaniana. Neither is your cup of tea (& mine only out of conviction, not personal passion).>

Dear Bob,

I have, as Richard will doubtless have told you, had a conversation with him about the Middle East. He is very firm in his views and, given a fez or tarbush, would be a worthy representative of the Syrian government, far more eloquent and convincing than anyone they have at present seen at the United Nations, doing rather better than Mr George Tomeh – I have forgotten his surname – who does their business for them.

In the meanwhile I am engaged in a correspondence with Arnold Toynbee which I am trying to shunt off on to Talmon. I sent Philip Toynbee the very same piece I and Mrs Tuchman sent to you. Toynbee – the old man, I mean – loved it (he came to stay with his son and read it there), and after years of embarrassed silence so far as I am concerned (he used to know me quite well at one time, and used to ask me to collaborate with him towards the end of the war, which I used courteously to decline: I really find him in some ways quite unbearable) broke his silence and sent me a copy of his letter to Talmon. A correspondence will now ensue between them which will make quite a decent-sized volume one day; like Gide and Claudel letters, these will doubtless be of interest to scholars. He tried to engage me in a similar enterprise – Arnold Toynbee, I mean – but I am not prepared to play. I would if I had more respect for him: he is a very gifted and in some ways even

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40 He is right. George Joseph Tomeh (1922–2004) was Permanent Representative (Ambassador) to the UN of the Syrian Arab Republic.
rather nice man: but he is madly vain, steeped in medieval values, hates the modern world, industrialism, colonialism, imperialism, rationalism, and therefore Communists, atheists, Jews, positivists, Trevor-Roper etc., and really holds a T. S. Eliot kind of outlook, plus an element of breast beating about the fearful iniquities of the West versus the East, and therefore a kind of Vichyssois, slightly George-Kennan-like, belief that anything the East does is natural revenge for the indignities and cruelties of the West, which the West must take patiently and as a deserved punishment for its betrayal of the spirit. All this I find immensely distasteful, although I think that he is an excellent writer, with a genuinely large horizon, and I have a certain respect for anyone with that kind of sweep who doesn’t try and hide himself in minute scholarship from the great issues of the past and present. That, I suppose, is why, for example, the admirable Momigliano has some respect for him – Momigliano who is the most left-wing of our cosmic historians and in the matter of the Middle East passionately and uncompromisingly anti-imperialist and pro-Israel. Of course all that you say about refugees is right. Stuart assures me that Dayan, when he said he was not interested in refugees, did not mean that they were inconvenient cattle, to be disposed of somehow, and not human beings. Whatever he may have meant, the Israelis have an obligation in this respect, and if they behave badly, this has to be said. I replied to Toynbee’s letter in manuscript and kept no copy and I have received a huge screed in manuscript from him, full of compliments, which embarrassed me. He is mainly concerned about the Jews not building the Temple in the sacred area and destroying the mosque of Omar and the mosque of Aksa in the process, which he rightly supposes would not be well received by the world at large and might indeed excite some anti-Jewish feeling. He does not think that the danger of this great act of vandalism is immediate, but he thinks that fanatics etc. might soon start working towards that end and wishes to record his dissent. If that were the only danger facing the Israelis they would be well off indeed. I have never heard anyone suggest that the Temple might be re-erected;
indeed I have an idea that one has to wait for the Messiah for that to happen; and unless Toynbee offers himself in that role – the marks of the Messiah as you know are known to Edmund Wilson alone – we are not in grave danger.

At the same time I feel that Israel is being surveyed (e.g. by you) too critically: (a) on the old Marxist ground of being subjectively innocent but objectively a block to progress, (b) on [the basis of] what might be called a kind of Marxist anti-nationalist recidivity to which corresponds liberal anti-Marxist recidivity. Let me explain what I mean.

1) This is simple enough: E. H. Carr, Deutscher etc: the Africans and Asians are struggling towards the light. Many ugly & cruel things are bound to occur in the course of this, whether owing to Western crimes or not. These are horrid bubbles on the wave of the (desirable and inevitable, but anyway desirable,) future (see Mrs Lindbergh on the Wave of the F.). Anything that obstructs this is to be resisted. Israel is a Western protuberance (whatever its virtues & however “subjectively” decent its aspirations) because it is technologically advanced in the midst of backwardness, therefore inevitably the last (we hope) thrust of neo-colonialism or imperialism. To defend it is to retard progress. Arab nationalism is an inevitable, if regrettable, concomitant & even stimulus to Arab social emancipation. Like the Menshevik Georgian Republic it is objectively counter-revolutionary. It must go. Richard is not remote from all this.

I hope this is not a caricature. I really don’t think it is. The point is that Arab nationalism is a progressive force: or at least a natural protest against humiliation & injustice. Israeli nationalism is reactionary because at best it is culturally tied to Western capitalism & white hegemony. Kibbutzim are a petty agrarian escapist utopia: some sort of petit Trianon – German musicologists or Russian dentists as farmers: Marie Antoinette as a milkmaid, pathetic, unreal, false consciousness etc.

Sartre disagrees: but tougher leftists are consistent. The Jews are a caricature of their own persecutors: & must perish, at least
politically, with them. So, I conjecture, the internationalists of, say, The Tribune who look on troubled Jewish Communists and chauvinists in Marxist clothing.

2. More complicated. And interests me far more. I feel this: that most problems are judged in terms of some explicit or implicit ideology or “position” or absence of position (e.g. R. Aron: Tocqueville: acute but not at home in any firm outlook: incapable & unwilling to influence action or even ideas in any definite direction). Now then: let us say one begins as a Marxist: then one condemns petty nationalisms: even the Jewish Bund (cf Plekhanov’s “Zionists who are afraid of sea-sickness”. Quite apt & funny). Hence anti-Zionism of an acute & violent sort (e.g. Meyer S[chapiro] in the twenties & thirties: & all those now on the Ford Foundation, Congress of C[ultural] Freedom, Encounter, C.I:A. etc.): but then what about Kibbutzim? how can one deny their social and moral value? that, plus Jews as victims of Germans, British, State Dept., etc. – Palestinian settlers as honest anti-capitalists, among the insulted, the oppressed – on the correct side of the dividing line? There follows a less or more reluctant, slightly grudging concession that maybe these are, more or less, O.K.: Meyer delivers lectures in Jerusalem: left wing Jewish academics from England perform a Hegira: when they return they cannot curse: all but Deutscher who does: & so in a slightly bemused way, like Sartre & Mme de Beauvoir, they bless. But: as soon as cloven hooves appear – the Israelis misbehave about something, refugees or sabre-rattling, the old Marx asserts himself in the semi-converts: & they speak more fiercely about Israeli misdeeds than they would about Irakis or Egyptians who are victims of imperialism & whose vices must be allowed for accordingly. Similarly: if one starts from an anti communist position (as say, I do) the opposite happens: Soviet oppression is trampling on men: the fanatical pattern itself is mad & destructive & degrading. Ah but what about Yugoslavia? Burma? Third World? Well yes, perhaps, given the ancien régime, etc. these are improvements. But as soon as Djilas goes to gaol, or Gomulka threatens the Jews, one snaps back to “it is a horrible
system all the same” – one does not receive each piece of news about communist enormities, trials, tortures, Russo-German pacts etc. with agonized reluctance – but on the contrary, as only too likely to occur, given the original denial of basic human interests or ideals on which the whole awful thing was built.

This works both ways: & so I observe ‘I told you so’ reactions – beyond their shortcomings – against the Israelis by the Marxists or para Marxists: & ditto against communists, however mild, revisionist, truly egalitarian by anti-Marxists anxious to pounce on deficiencies & inevitably pulled back to the original ideological framework in which they feel, in the end, most at home. I have an idea that liberals who praise Tito or left wing socialists who praise Israel do so as a conscious concession, to be withdrawn at the slightest sign of misbehaviour: & even when they go much further & dilute their liberalism or socialism with other ingredients & become mild & syncretist, there is a tendency to recidivity: to hark back to the old orthodoxy: Jews in arms, defeating, dominating, perhaps maltreating natives – blacks, browns, etc. revives recollections of imperialists shooting down helpless aborigines: Tito cracking down on Mihailov, Nasser employing real Nazis & ex-S.S. men revives militant liberalism & loathing of flash dictators. This is in part what the poor Israelis (as I see them) will pay for in New York: & among the old pro-Arab sentimental British district commissioners & Freya Starks & Nuttings: not the size of their actual misdeeds (measured in terms of ordinary standards such as wd apply to neutrals, about whom there is no special feeling – say about Burmese or Brazilians) but the extent to which they deviate from some stereotype originally directed against their establishment, this will determine degrees of indignation. So it seems to me. They will be judged by ideal standards: the others by easy going “real” ones. No one is as suspicious of Jews as Jews: no one will make such efforts to escape suspicion of undue bias. All this being said: Talmon & Mrs Tuchman are not Mazzini & Harriet
Beecher Stowe: & can be left to what Nabokov calls Hourani Polanyi Masani.\(^{41}\)

Why don’t you come to Via Gave, Paraggi, Santa Margherita Ligure? S.M. 88441? to see Stuart & Prof. Hart – the provincial Englishman as Cal L[owell] called him? & despite Nabokov’s now real distaste for U.S.S.R – he evidently hated being there – if you & Cal go, let me know in time: if this doesn’t work, I may go to Israel (whither Nicolas \textit{pants} to go: \textit{his} Russia is there) to which I’ve stoutly refused to go thus far: I don’t like joining in celebrations even if they are in respectable taste: I \textit{would} go if there was a job to do: but at present I shall leave that to Weidenfeld who is their chief factotum here: for once out of sincere feeling: the dozen contracts for books are really only a by-product: his Zionism is his most estimable \& disinterested human quality. I wonder what Mr Payson\(^{42}\) thinks.

Love to Richard \& to the Lowells: I have just had a word with Lowenthal who is pro-Lasky \& poured scorn on poor Stephen: I do think there is a dearth of some human quality in \textit{real} communists (not those briefly in the thirties): whether current or ex- – don’t you! there is a suicide of some sort somewhere: \& they avenge themselves on the world forever after: even dear N. O. Brown

Do come to Italy.

yrs

Isaiah

\textit{In 1967 Graham Greene proposed in a circular letter to all honorary members of the American Academy–Institute of Arts and Letters,}\(^{43}\) \textit{of}\n
\(^{41}\) Albert Hourani (F 292/6), probably Michael Polanyi, possibly Minocher Masani.

\(^{42}\) Charles Shipman Payson (1898–1985), businessman and lawyer in NYC, father of Weidenfeld’s 3rd wife, Sandra Payson.

\(^{43}\) The American Academy of Arts and the National Institute of Arts and Letters were sister institutions (merged in 1976 as the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters), with foreigners as honorary members.
TO GRAHAM GREENE

18 September 1967

Headington House

Dear Greene,

I am very sorry to have received your letter only now in Oxford, from which unfortunately it was not forwarded to me in Italy. I am not sure that my views on the war in Vietnam altogether coincide with yours, but at any rate I wish it would stop at once, immediately, everywhere, without victories. I have gone on record on these issues in language as clear and forcible as I can make it.\(^{44}\)

But the proposal in your letter concerns only the American Academy–Institute of Arts and Letters. All the members of it that I know – American members, I mean – are bitterly against the war in Vietnam and [I] certainly do not conceal my views; and any [sc. at a] meeting of it that I attended – last year – this was very clear indeed. Robert Lowell, George Kennan, Meyer Schapiro are only a few of these: those who talked that day were deeply committed and articulate in this matter. I don’t think that Nevins’s\(^{45}\) exposition means anything much or has any relation [to reality] now. In the City University of New York, in which I worked, the professors and lecturers continually organised protest meetings, marches etc. – indeed the mood in academic circles, at any rate on the East Coast, was to the left of, say, Walter Lippmann.

\(^{44}\) In his contribution to Cecil Woolf and John Bagguley (eds), *Authors take Sides on Vietnam* (New York, 1967: Simon and Schuster), 20–1; repr. as ‘Taking Sides on Vietnam’ at B 601–2.

\(^{45}\) The historian and journalist (Joseph) Allan Nevins (1890–1971). Greene’s circular letter quoted Nevins’s 1966 presidential address to the Academy, which stated that ‘It is not a proper function of the Academy and Institute to concern themselves with […] political events.’ Elsewhere Nevins made clear his support for the Vietnam War as a necessary element in the fight against Communism.
In these circumstances I cannot see what is to be gained, except a gratuitous insult to decent persons, if one demonstratively resigns from a body whose general attitude is morally sympathetic and politically absolutely decent. You may disagree with me and think it nevertheless right to resign; I should understand that and respect it. If I do not accept your invitation, it is not either because I believe in continuing the Vietnam war (although I would not know how it is to be stopped immediately, save by measures which might lead to massacre in South Vietnam, which seems to me no better than what is going on now), still less because I believe in the ivory tower. I do not propose to follow your method of action, but I warmly applaud your motive in writing: what the Americans are doing is stupid & wrong.

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah Berlin

In reply Greene wrote that as a result of IB’s letter he and Herbert Read had delayed the letter of resignation until an attempt had been made to secure a statement from the Academy. He also declared himself less pessimistic than IB about the prospects of ending the war. Neither the statement nor the mass resignation was forthcoming, and on 19 May 1970 Greene resigned in a personal protest.46

§ TO ROBERT SILVERS

New Year’s Day 1968

The Beersheba Desert Inn

I cannot resist sending you this rather disloyal postcard. Jerusalem is marvellously beautiful: suddenly very grand and noble, after

being a kind of Berlinian Charlottenburg – Gombriches,\textsuperscript{47} Mo Finlays,\textsuperscript{48} + New. Sch. of Social R.\textsuperscript{49} – which I quite liked, but Stephen wouldn’t (& didn’t). Politically they live out of the world: remote from the opinions of mankind, self preoccupied, anxious, not at all jubilant or blown out with their prowess or expansionist, but totally provincial, localized, & sunk in local politics – not of the same race as American tourists who find them uncosy; divided between those who are ready to become Sparta & those who abhor this. The nicest are the students & the soldiers. Those from English speaking countries are the worst.

I.B.

Aline sends love. She likes the Desert Inn: & whatever is farthest from Prof. Talmon.

\textsuperscript{47} Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich (1909–2001), Kt 1972, Jewish refugee from Vienna, one of the best-known art historians in post-war Britain, was married to Ilse Heller (1910–2006), Czech pianist.

\textsuperscript{48} Moses Finley (1912–86), US-born ancient historian, was married to Mary (née Moscowitz) (1907–86), a schoolteacher.

\textsuperscript{49} The New School for Social Research was founded in New York in 1919 and became a home for many well-known refugees from European Fascism in the 1930s, including Hannah Arendt and Erich Fromm.
The stamp and some of IB’s deletions obscure parts of the original conclusion of the PS: ‘Desert Inn & whatever is remotest [from Prof.] Talmon & coffee […] at 9 pm. If […] Dep[…]’.
TO JEAN FLOUD

Postmark 19 June 1968 [manuscript]

Dearest Jean,

This morning the British Academy Committee met on the Skidelsky case: Lionel Robbins said ‘But he will improve the image of Mosley.’ Mosley is to me incarnate evil. If he came into the room I shd walk out at once. I cannot vote for this.[’] However we voted: & gave it him: Herbert delivered a noble liberal oration: about the truth & no prejudice about subjects etc. The two

Jean Esther Floud (1915–2013), sociologist and college head; taught sociology at the University of London (LSE and Institute of Education) 1947–62; Official Fellow of Nuffield 1963–72; Commission of Inquiry into Oxford University (Franks Commission) 1964–6; later (1972–83) Principal, Newnham, Cambridge. She married, 1938, the civil servant Peter Floud (1911–60), who was alleged to have had connections with the Oxford spy ring to which Jenifer Hart had belonged. Her friend Robert Skidelsky described her in an obituary as ‘one of Britain’s leading educational sociologists’, her career ‘a triumph of brains, charm and presence over class and gender prejudice’ (Guardian, 5 April 2013, 38). JF got to know IB through her work on the Franks Commission, had many intellectual interests in common with him, and became one of his closest friends. This letter was written to her in New York.

Robert Jacob Alexander Skidelsky (b. 1939), later (1991) life peer; historian; Research Fellow, Nuffield, 1965–8; British Academy 1968–70; later (1970–6) associate professor of history, Johns Hopkins. Skidelsky had applied for financial assistance from the Thank-Offering to Britain Fund in order to pursue his biographical research into the life of the British Fascist leader Oswald Mosley. The fund’s origins (B 228/2) made Skidelsky’s choice of research topic a sensitive one, and caused serious problems when his biography of Mosley was published in 1975 (see supplement to A). The Fund was administered by the British Academy, and IB was one of its patrons with Lionel Robbins, Ernst Chain and Hans Krebs. JF argued strongly against Skidelsky’s application, but never raised the issue with him directly, and their close friendship remained undisturbed.

Oswald Ernald Mosley (1896–1980), sixth baronet; Fascist politician; founder of the anti-Semitic British Union of Fascists 1932; interned during the Second World War as a security risk.

37
representatives of the German Jewish donors sat there like timid rabbits, not daring to intervene in a debate between the great (Robbins) and good(?) and wise (Herbert & Wheare). They were a little shocked by Herbert’s refusal to consider their feelings to which I, coward as I am, nevertheless finally gave voice: & said I wd nevertheless vote for the award: but tell Skidelsky that he was a monster of insensitiveness not to show any sign, in the interview, of the peculiarity of the application. He promised in the course of the interview to give details of Lord Nuffield’s support of Mosley: but he will exaggerate his, M’s, brilliance, intelligence, public spirit in the 1930ies: those who knew him in his socialist phase thought him personally odious: Keynes didn’t but … I don’t wish to lecture you on M. […]

I. […]

TO THE EDITORS OF THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS

Published 20 June 1968

[Headington House]

Mr Miller’s\(^{54}\) attempted correction of my facts is either irrelevant or mistaken. The two circles of which he speaks, and the very cool relationship between them in the early 1830s, is, perhaps, the most familiar of all pieces of knowledge in the field of nineteenth-century Russian history of ideas. There is not a textbook, however elementary, Soviet and non-Soviet, which does not dwell on this celebrated fact. But it has no bearing upon my description of Herzen towards the end of the 1830s and beginning of the next decade. Mr Miller (relying I fear on some popular exposition) says that Herzen returned to Moscow only in 1842: but this is not the case. He was, it is true, fully pardoned only in 1842, but he was allowed to live in Vladimir by 1838, from which he paid several clandestine visits to Moscow, and he returned to Moscow more or less openly in late summer of 1839. In December he went to St

\(^{54}\) To whose letter in the same issue IB is replying.
Petersburg and met Belinsky before the year was out; a correspondence between them began almost at once; Belinsky’s notorious ‘reconciliation with reality’ caused a rift, ended only later in 1840. From then on there is an intimate relationship between them which remains uninterrupted despite Herzen’s exile to Novgorod in 1841. By 1843 Granovsky, Turgenev and Belinsky all saw a good deal of each other: they all stayed together in Herzen’s house in the country. It was during this time that the most passionate disputes about Hegel, Schiller, Schelling etc. occurred; it was the period of Granovsky’s famous Moscow lectures, which marked the first great split between the Slavophiles and the ‘Westerners’. It was this group of writers of which Herzen was one of the leaders. According to Strakhov, an accurate reporter of Russian ideas, Herzen’s philosophical ascendancy was recognised at this time by Bakunin, Belinsky and Granovsky. Mr Miller, who thinks that Herzen remained in exile until 1842, naturally assumes that he could not have met Bakunin on his return, since Bakunin emigrated in 1840. I do not know whether Mr Miller reads Russian. If not, Mr E. H. Carr’s excellent biography of Bakunin (pp. 79–89) could inform him that Herzen was immensely im-pressed by Bakunin, whom he met sometime in 1839–40, and that, whatever Herzen’s opinion of Bakunin’s moral character, the personal bonds between them were lifelong. Indeed, it was Herzen alone who made it possible for Bakunin to go to Germany in 1840, by lending him a sufficient sum of money; and it was Herzen who saw him off at St Petersburg, and thereafter followed his writings and career in the West with rapt attention, as his letters testify. These were the companions of Herzen’s intellectually formative years, the society in which the Russian intelligentsia was born, as Mr Miller could learn if he turned to the classical work on this subject, Annenkov’s A Remarkable Decade. The fact that Bakunin physically left it, although he remained in correspondence with its members, is neither here nor there.

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

[Isaiah Berlin]

*TO JEAN FLOUD

5 July 1968 [manuscript]

Wolfson

Dear Jean:

[…] when you are moved by indignation you write particularly well: it is a marvellous and just indictment: and shd be read by Herbert and raise issues of principle and moral taste without which (last) morality cannot occur (there, the sentence ends grammatically after all).

I did vote for giving S. the money: although Herbert said he could not see, given my stated view, why I did. Lionel Robbins started off by saying that to him Mosley was the incarnation of evil: that if he entered a room, he, Lionel, wd leave it at once. Sayers did not say this: but cast doubts on the importance of the subject.

55 This passage appears to be garbled.

Wheare (chairman) said nothing. Herbert spoke eloquently to the effect that a true and competent account of Fascism was a service not only to the truth but to those who wished to understand & avoid the evils in question. The two chief promoters of the fund were there. One remained silent but voted with the other who spoke forcibly in favour of S. (who in the interview said he would write about antisemitism, Lord Nuffield’s contributions to the movement, etc.) on the ground that the victims cd only gain by a careful analysis: a warning that even able, interesting, sincere men etc. cd cause such disasters & become so vicious. After this I did, plucking up all my tiny stock of courage, I did say that it was embarrassing that Mosley would emerge in a better light than that in which we liked to think of him: that there was a problem: Lionel said he was impressed by Herbert’s cogent arguments, & wd not oppose; Sayers too: I voted in favour because – given the donors’ views – I could not see how we cd defend refusing S. given that we thought (a) that he was good enough (b) that the dangers of fascism in England were not such that the truth shd be suppressed pro tem: (c) that where the case is dubious, it was best to lean towards no censorship. But I remained guilt ridden (not difficult for me) & attacked Herbert with some acerbity when we had lunch in a Wimpy later. If you had been there & spoken as you wrote, you wd have won I think, even against dear (dear?) Herbert. Stuart & Wollheim think we cd not but have done as we did. […]

I wrote to Skidelsky before receiving your hot words & summoned him: I told the committee I would: & tell him about the moral reservations which all of us had in very varying degrees. I wonder if he will come: I warned him that I wd moralize. I shall tell him that he must atone for his moral obtuseness by going

57 William Richard Morris (1877–1963), 1st Viscount Nuffield 1938; pioneer British motor manufacturer, Chairman of Morris Motors Ltd 1919–52; a major philanthropist, founder of Nuffield College, Oxford; in 1930, during the Depression, he was persuaded by Oswald Mosley to give substantial financial support to help found Mosley’s New Party, in the belief that it would reinvigorate the economy and society; but as Mosley’s Fascism became plainer, Morris withdrew his backing.
beyond the course which John [lament]z[am], in his testimonial (or silly Max B. in his) promised he would do. Aline does I think agree with you. So, of course, do I. Yet I distrust my feelings: & wd lean towards abstract liberalism (which lets in thugs?) so long as I can persuade myself that there is no real danger. I wd do the same, I suppose, for some rabidly antisemitic anti-Zionist if I thought he had something true & important to say. Thus do we crumble & Weimar fall: but I don’t think it is yet time to line up & resist the enemy. I did do my best to persuade the German Jews not to call it “Thank You” Fund: but the 1938 Fund: they are refugees from the Kristallnacht. In the end it was called Thank Offering to Britain Fund[: idiotic but a tiny bit better, I suppose. I negotiated the whole thing & so feel particularly upset – & promised to deliver the Thank Off. Lecture in 1970: I cd do it on Skidelsky’s book I suppose & try to expose its moral inadequacies: odd taste that would be in. Still. […]

I.

[*TO JEAN FLOUD*]

7 July 1968 [manuscript]

[Postmark Oxford]

Dear J.

[…] I read Herbert & Jenifer bits of your Skidelsky indictment: Herbert is genuinely deaf to the nuances of the situation: Jenifer on the whole agreed with you: so did Diana Trilling: Lionel, I thought, rather less. I saw no harm in telling them of what you, Aline, Bob, I, Herbert, etc. felt about this imbroglio. To-morrow I see Skidelsky: I cannot order or even urge him to write this rather than that kind of book: but I can preach to him about what Mosley means: why I cd not be in a room with him. […]

58 He didn’t.
I am about to write to Herbert officially about senior/junior Oxford rapport: nothing about discipline: but something about listening to undergraduate criticism of curricula: and about the reasonableness of their resistance to the idea that they should be treated as recruits for technological forces: Trotsky’s labour battalions: the Left is deeply divided on this: the ideal of full developed human beings seems vaguely classical, reactionary, Tory to some: or rather it is theoretically accepted but only after the horrible wars are over: when the enemy has been routed: after the corridor of the dictatorship of the good: when, we all know, it will be too late. Anti-amateurism can take hideously technocratic forms: the Fulton Report is at once feeble & anti-humane: the troglodyte Hunt who wrote it lives in a Chesterish sort of cavern. Reading Russian radicals in the sixties – who also protest against polite class ridden culture – & encourage revolt & outrageous behaviour & explosion: in the simple belief (shared, I suppose, by Cohn Bendit etc.?) that once the “consumer” society is blown up rich full human lives – a world Kibbutz full of natural affection & natural justice, follows – is the old fairy tale: dragon slain: the heroes lose their hideous disguises & live happily for ever after. How does one show that this is naive & it all costs seas of blood not followed by the reign of universal love? This is what the miserable centrists, the contemptible moderates, the crypto-reactionary sceptical intellectuals have always agonized over. Popper, Hayek, are too dogmatic & too conceited & removed from the actual lives of the people they are prescribing for: & blind, complacent, &

59 In 1968 Herbert Hart chaired the University’s Committee on Relations with Junior Members, a subject largely overlooked in the Franks Report of 1966, but which had become acutely important in the interim. Hart’s report, published 1969 and duly implemented, proposed reform of the disciplinary system, and ways of involving students more in the running of the university; it contributed to the quelling of student protests that had, for the most part, already run their course. IB believed strongly that student opinion should be consulted more often, and listened to with greater attention. He did write to Hart, but not until 10 October.
scholastic. Chomsky is too irresponsibly utopian. Whom shd one follow? I long for leaders: I am a natural hero worshipper: I long for a flag: I should readily suppress truth, sign petitions supported by specious reasoning, attack old friends, behave like a partisan, if I found a cause or a leader I wholly believed in: perhaps I can only say this so confidently because I know I shall not find such a one: no feet to sit at [...]. I have seen Skidelsky: he is clever & nice but understands nothing about people or movements. I have lectured him & told him you & I were both “worried”. [...] I.

TO GEORGE KENNAN

9 December 1968 [manuscript]

As from Wolfson College Office, Oxford

Dear George

Let me first say how delighted I am that Oxford has acted in a proper – if obvious – fashion (it is in the Times to-day.) in offering you a degree. It almost makes up for their failure to do this for De Gaulle in 1946 when all the other great commanders were honoured – as Alexander I of Russia was in, I think, 1814 or 15. Nor is there anyone among your co-honorands of whom you need – or we need – feel embarrassed: no rich barbarians, no ephemeral politicians, no bad but famous poets etc. So it is all highly satisfactory. We much look forward to seeing you & Annalisa. We leave for New York – for my biennial stint there – in mid-February (till Mid-May) – when will you be giving the Chichele

60 (Avram) Noam Chomsky (b. 1928), influential US linguist, philosopher, pioneer in psycholinguistics, and astringent political activist and commentator; joined the faculty of MIT in 1955, and has taught there ever since; John Locke Lecturer at Oxford 1969; a consistent and active left-wing critic of US foreign policy, adamantly opposed to the Vietnam War.

61 i.e. on 8 July: a postscript?

62 Not found.

63 Hon. DCL, conferred on 25 June 1969.
Lectures? Before mid-February or after mid-May, I hope. I’m still waiting to get an ordered copy of your book about the students. (I thought your memoirs beautifully written – but you know that – & profoundly moving: nobody now writes about Russia now as you do. This is, if you’ll forgive my saying this, a difficult and perhaps painful love affair – but this is what rubs the system & causes pearls to grow. To transmute one’s inner life into works of art – stones cut into shapes for men to look at and be moved by, is given to how many? & how many men in public life?) I hope All Souls behaves itself: Oxford went through a mild turmoil – of which All Souls was the unjust target – but this is very small beer compared to the real catastrophes of Paris or Colombia or Berkeley or Rome. It is as if 1848–9 had also broken out in Copenhagen: owing to the forces of imitation: not the real thing. I expect it will be peaceful by the time you come. It will be very nice to see you – & talk to you.

yrs
Isaiah.

*TO ROBERT SILVERS

30 May 1969

[Headington House]

Dear Bob,

I am delighted that you have recovered and long to tell you all about Chomsky here. The reception is by no means uncritical although masses of students come. To his lecture on ‘The Intellectual and Post-Industrial Society’ fifteen hundred persons came in Oxford – I presided as competently as I could. It was very like an exposition in the middle 1930s, full of charm, lucidity, acrid ironies and with the most over-simplified kind of Marxism I ever heard on such an occasion. He really does think that United States foreign policy is entirely dictated by business interests – stated in a

On ‘The Marquis de Custine and the Russia of 1839’.
sophisticated form this could perhaps be made not too unplausible; but in the form in which he gives it, it is exactly like one of the Gollancz Left Book Club pamphlets: his voice, his manner, his charm, his singularly irresistible personality that hallows it all. I am about to have a long conversation with him about the Middle East. His views I am sure will be noble, simple and tranquil, like Winckelmann’s conception of classical art – but not related to verifiable empirical facts. I love him more than ever and spend time with him, but his grasp of empirical reality is not very strong. I beg you not to pass this on, but when he solemnly informed us at dinner that the reason for the recall of George Kennan by Dulles was that he was too friendly to the Soviet Union – when in fact he had to return because he said that the Soviet regime was worse or as bad as the Nazis, at the airport in Berlin, as you recollect (a fact which Chomsky seems absolutely astonished to hear) – this seemed to be not altogether untypical. Still I thought his lecture was an event. Mrs Floud did not; she liked him personally but thought that the content of his remarks reminded her of the crudest and most naive & simplified form of Marxism, which she had once followed uncritically (though, she says, never as blindly as Chomsky) and had reacted against in due course. And indeed there is a curious mixture of subtlety and sophistication about theoretical matters, great moral charm and authority, extreme unrealism, dogmatic assurance (the philosophers here refuse to accept his doctrine, either linguistic or philosophical), sense of mission, purity of soul and almost a hatred of empirical reality (his views on the actual aspirations of Arabs, negroes, American liberals

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

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

67 John Foster Dulles (1888–1959), lawyer and Republican statesman, Secretary of State under Eisenhower 1953–9, a strong advocate of the nuclear deterrent in the Cold War.
etc. are very very eccentric indeed. He is a moralist: but a terribly bad observer). If he had stuck to the proposition that intellectuals should always tell the truth, never play being politicians, never temporise or compromise, however utopian or unrealistic their ideas, that would be much better. As it is the boys love it – at least the radical ones – and everybody over twenty-seven is highly sceptical. […]

Yours ever,
Isaiah

Wheeler Bennett is looking forward to his article for you on the Trott book by Sykes.68 He is justifiably indignant about D. Astor loony article in Encounter.69

TO ROBERT SILVERS

15 July 1969

Wolfson

Dear Bob,

We both enjoyed your visit very much indeed, as you may have noticed. And indeed a certain amount of affection and peace reigned between everyone present, which is not always the case. […]

Diana is still engaged in explaining that nothing could have conceivably been further from her intentions than the remotest suggestion that anyone she spoke to should be persuaded in any way to even give a thought to not contributing to your periodical.


Evidently the notion that there might have been some element of propaganda in her and Norman P’s remarks to Stephen and me that evening has sunk very deep into her conscience. If you do publish something by Lionel this will expose him in his turn to criticisms by *Encounter*. All this I view with undisguised pleasure. Thank you for sending me Noam’s answer. I did not think particularly well of Lionel Abel’s piece – I thought he scored some points, and is, on the whole, an honest and independent man, and his attack was not vicious or mechanical along any party line, but I thought Noam’s answer was noble, dignified and at least three-quarters convincing. The idea that great powers must behave barbarously, if that is what Abel meant, and that one must accept a kind of Machiavellian universe in which huge cruel forces constantly collide with each other and men are destroyed because of some inevitable sociological law [by] which vast beasts wander about in the political jungle, and cannot but try to gore each other, is, as you imagine, something that I reject with both hands. It is clear to me that if I have to vote on one side or the other I vote with Noam, even though he goes too far for me, and I think is in some ways a naive Marxist, and tends to misinterpret both his opponents and the complex nature of the facts (particularly, of course, about Israel: the excellent left-wing poet Oz with whom I spent a happy evening, who is a friend of Noam’s, certainly does not think that the idea of a bi-national state is anything that can be advocated not merely as a short-term, but even as a middle-term, solution (as a long-term solution, an ideal, yes) & I agree.). He really is a very nice man, and if he could be imported to New York, he really would help to discuss the problem with honest left-of-centre characters, and indeed very left-wing ones too, in a much more honourable way than any official propagandist.

My only real point of difference with you is I think that you think that Rodinson has written a book that it is useful to read – and Noam thinks it too – I confess that I have not read it properly because I am nauseated both by the style and the attitude, apart from what one knows about the man. Must I read it? Is there really
something in it which one ought to take to heart? It looks to me like an extremely intelligent piece of crypto-Stalinist, mechanical interpretation, and on the whole not so much false and misleading as contemptible. Is this too strong? Meanwhile, I go on teasing Stuart about Israel – he professes to be strongly for it, but in fact is worried by any deviation from what he takes to be a truly socialist line – and tends to defend rather terrible Moral Rearmors, like Mayhew, because he is a member of the Labour Party, and he shrewdly suspects that I am not. Anyway, I will discuss all this à l’outrance with him in Italy next week, when he comes to stay with us for about ten days. The opinion of him in England is really disgracefully unjust, and one day I shall write an indignant piece about it, when it can do no harm. As for Pasternak’s Blind Beauty: I shall read it in Russian – it seems to me a weak work, not really worth writing about, for I think it does his reputation not merely no good, but actually some harm, in spite of the very serious and respectful reviews it got in the British Press, solely because of its authorship. John Gross’s book is extremely pleasure-giving. As for dear George Lichtheim: when I asked Stuart whether he could repeat to me his long lecture to him, at your party, about Habermas, nothing emerged at all. I wish you would force these people to write things down in clear and modest prose, and just humble themselves to the task of exposition of unfamiliar doctrines, instead of lofty allusions and knowledgeable gossip. “This is what Hamann, my obscure hero, said God had done in his sacred books: & he reproached Kant, an old friend, with declining to humble himself to the Almighty’s level.”

I long, some time, to write something for your periodical (if only for the sake of Diana T.), but I am absorbed in new discoveries about Vico. Do come and see us in Italy in summer if you can – it really would be worth your while to take a special flight with no other thought at all; come to us, stay a week and go back, if that is all you can do. Believe me it will do you good physically, and perhaps even in other respects – I say cautiously – to be in that most beautiful country, away from the Xerox machine ← better
than even the West Indies. Besides you wd find dear Marietta in Naples.

With much love,
Isaiah

PS I have ordered the Hart Report to be sent to you: Appendix A, or whichever it is that discusses the students, is the one worth reading. Have you read a violent attack on Harvard students in the London Times of 12th July? by Holroyd, author of L. Strachey? Too much for even me.

TO JOHN SPARROW

15 July 1969
Headington House

Dear John,

You must surely know, whatever you may say, that a letter from you (I do not say ‘such as yours’, because to put a letter into a class, or any personal relationship into general terms – ‘such friendship as yours’, ‘the type of relationship that I have with you’ etc. – seems to me to destroy almost all that is of value; I need not enlarge on that – ‘such a sensibility, intelligence etc. as yours’ would easily grasp the point) gave me pleasure without end. Not only because every time one offers something in a public market one remains skinless, and peculiarly vulnerable, for a time at least, and any mention of one’s name, particularly in public, causes one to wince, criticism of course is terrible, and even praise in one’s peculiar condition is something that one tends to look in the mouth; but you must know all this yourself too well, nor do I believe those who say they never read reviews (like Virginia Woolf or Iris Murdoch). I say it because you are a very incorruptible and very fastidious critic, and friendship does not blind you to the object and its properties. You may say, and you do say, that this is not the kind of subject with which you can claim expertise; that your approval may be motivated by moral and political agreement etc.
All this may be so, but your sense of quality – of what’s what – of what comes up to standards of the finest possible differences between the fourth-rate and the third-rate, or the first-rate and that which transcends it – is as acute as any that I know (general term again! but here I think in place), and therefore this kind of sentiment from you does something – indeed a very great deal – to counteract the appalling self-depreciation and lack of confidence from which I have suffered all my life, and from which I suffer still to an extreme degree. I never think that anything that I do is any good – this is not an exaggeration. That is why after every lecture or talk I have ever delivered, I am possessed by a strong sense of shame. I feel the jig is up, they can see through me, it’s no good going on, these are hollow words, the whole thing is a pathetic fraud. This may be an exaggerated description, but nothing less than that quite describes the humiliation that I constantly suffer. If anything critical is said I always believe it to be absolutely true and probably an understatement, however indignant I may feel; this seems a contradiction, but it is so. If praise is uttered I feel it to be genuinely more than my due – the critic must have missed something, he must be thinking of something else, or be particularly well disposed towards me, or wish to prop me up in what he sees to be my pathetic condition, etc. I despise no one so much that harsh words from such a quarter do not affect me at all, nor respect anyone so much that I think praise from such a quarter is literally just. You may imagine therefore, that however much I may think that you have overpraised me – and I do – I am infinitely grateful for a gift which I genuinely need, if I am to go on. I have a feeling that, as David Cecil has so often said about himself, having never been in fashion, I am now distinctly out of it; that what I write about and what I say is so remote from the mood and the language, whether of professional philosophers or passionate advocates in universities, or the press, that I am thought of as a respectable relic of an obsolete period. Of course I console myself with the thought that posterity – someone, one day – will perceive in things that I write a thin rill of a civilised tradition, gone
underground perhaps, which connects me in however small a way (and I am not suffering from false modesty in saying this) with various thinkers whom I respect. But this is true of all minor poets, writers etc., hence your words lift me, I do not know for how long, from such self-pitying contemplation to the thought that perhaps I have got something to say, perhaps my adversaries are not as formidable and certainly not as intellectually impressive as they seem to some – perhaps what I am doing is not useless, perhaps one ought to go on and on and do what I am doing now, which is to publish my collected works in paperbacks, one by one, instead of an impressive shelf like ALR. Hence my gratitude. That is only one reason for it. The other is wholly personal – I am absolutely delighted that you should have written me this letter and shall never, never forget it. And there may be real truth in it – a grain – two grains – I feel it may have been worth it after all.

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

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

Isaiah

TO DAVID CARVER

18 November 1969

Headington House

Dear Carver,

I am, of course, deeply touched by the great honour – great and astonishing – which the Executive Committee of the English Centre of PEN has done me in proposing that I become President during the coming year. And I apologise the more deeply for having delayed replying for so long – this is, apart from the general chaos of my life, due to my effort to persuade myself that it would
be right to accept: but the effort has not been successful thus far, although, if only for reasons of pure personal vanity, I have done my best. There are three obstacles which I feel bound to draw your attention to.

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

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

3. At a time when so many writers are persecuted and the voice of PEN should certainly be raised in the hope, however often disappointed, that this will help the cause of humanity and freedom, it is desirable that the President of PEN should not be viewed with particular disfavour by any of the governments whose activities need to be attacked or criticised, and whose behaviour it is desired to modify. I have a suspicion that in the Soviet Union I am regarded with some disfavour – anyone who writes on Russian literature and does not adhere to, or at any rate, refrain from criticising, the official Soviet line is regarded with peculiar disapproval, not to say hostility: you know this well. Moreover I have refrained thus far from criticising the Soviet government openly for its oppression of writers and artists because I discovered that various persons, including the poet Akhmatova, as well as members of my family who remained in Russia after 1917, suffered probably, in part at least, because of alleged association with
myself. It may be that this phase is over, or at any rate not as acute as it was: however it is a risk that I dare not take, hence my silence about some of the most outrageous acts of that wicked government. It seems to me that if I became Chairman of the British Centre it might give the Russians some apparent excuse for denouncing us as ideological enemies: they might do that in any case, but one is anxious not to provide them with any gratuitous excuse for doing it.

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

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

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah Berlin

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TO ROBERT SILVERS

9 December 1969

Headington House

Dear Bob,

I enclose a pamphlet by RISE – R stands for revolutionary, I for Israel, S for either students or socialists and E I have no idea, not executive or anything too ferocious. It was lent to me by a perfectly nice young man at present in Oxford, originally from Poland, and when you come to England, although we cannot alas dine with you and Stephen, I should greatly like you to meet three or four of these young men. They are left-wing socialists, not mad, in touch with various Arabs (though that does little good) opposed to Matzpen – which is the anti-Israeli group of whom there are not more, so they say, than twenty-five persons in Israel and some ten abroad (but they write to The Times, send affidavits of horror stories
to various other newspapers, etc.) – and think Chomsky’s\(^70\) solution totally unacceptable. (I haven’t written to Noam yet about his piece – I suppose I ought to, but I keep putting it off for various reasons; for what can I say but that I love him but think his ideas hideously unrealistic and to that extent a source of ungratuitous irritation to the real Israeli left?) But before you go to Jerusalem it would be nice if you could have an hour or so with these extremely attractive young men, who are not clever but morally quite impressive: in particular the novelist Oz,\(^71\) the philosophers Margalit\(^72\) and Moked,\(^73\) the biologist Chen\(^74\) and perhaps the Prof. Ettinger,\(^75\) who must have left Russia somewhere in the middle 1930s and is a professor in Jerusalem and a most knowledgeable and intelligent, lively man. I could drag them up to London, since you will have little time, if you tell me when you think you will be free before the actual flight, to which I look forward enormously, and so does Aline. As for what happens at the other end, it does not matter. It will right itself I feel. Your nursemaid is said to be called Sachs\(^76\) of the English Department of the University of Jerusalem – not, so far as I know, known to me. Ryan’s\(^77\) piece seems to me rather good – he was long underestimated both by Richard\(^78\) and Stuart. I feel vindicated – we backed him all along.

Love,
Isaiah

\(^70\) Chomsky has been a critic of US foreign policy and of the state of Israel since the 1960s.

\(^71\) Amos Oz (1939–2018), one of Israel’s leading novelists and intellectuals.

\(^72\) Avishai Margalit (b. 1939), leading Israeli philosopher, long-time friend of IB and regular contributor to the NYRB.

\(^73\) Gabriel Moked (b. 1933), Israeli philosopher and literary editor.

\(^74\) David Chen (b. 1937), Israeli educationalist.

\(^75\) Shmuel Ettinger (1919–88), Israeli historian.

\(^76\) Arieh Sachs (1932–92), Israeli literary academic.

\(^77\) Alan Ryan (b. 1940), British philosopher at Oxford and then Princeton, and a regular contributor to the NYRB. The piece was “The ‘New’ Locke”, published the previous month.

\(^78\) Richard Wollheim (1923–2003), British philosopher.
2 February 1970

Dear Bob,

The Wadham agony continues.\(^{79}\) The fact that the *New Statesman* today should have said something about how Freddie’s withdrawal plunged them all into chaos and how Prof. Hampshire is waiting in the wings will not improve matters.\(^{80}\) All this must come from some enemy I have an awful feeling that, in the end, the Left will vote against Stuart and this may seal his fate. For them he is (\& always was) a Bloomsbury intellectual, too well dressed, too *soigné*, too refined altogether – the Right wing and the Old, which is much the same, will think that he will be too bored with the details of administration, which is far from true, in fact. I hope to God he gets it. I pray for this daily and hourly but do not feel optimistic. He has done better than Freddie – what mild pleasure this bleak reflection gives him I do not know, but it is insufficient.

I have read Bar-Hillel now and it is a pathetic and touching document. I understand his feelings quite well and still his positive proposals are not related to any possible reality, any more than Noam’s. For example: he wants to limit immigration in order not to frighten the Arabs. Why? Everyone knows that in normal times immigration will proceed at the present pretty low rate; but if there is a pogrom in South Africa or the Argentine – let alone Russia –

\(^{79}\) Wadham College was in the throes of appointing a new Warden in succession to Maurice Bowra, due to retire in August. Stuart Hampshire was a contender for the post, but the College had a long tradition of electing from within its ranks, and A. J. ‘Freddie’ Ayer, an honorary fellow since 1957, had been widely tipped to succeed Bowra. IB was unduly pessimistic about Hampshire’s chances, perhaps because he so wished for his success.

\(^{80}\) In his ‘London Diary’ column in the *New Statesman* (30 January 1970, 143), Anthony Howard observed that the Wadham process ‘seems to be taking an interminable time’; the withdrawal of A. J. Ayer, ‘the most-fancied candidate’, had left the field ‘totally clouded and confused, though Professor Stuart Hampshire (now of Princeton) is said still to be visible as a late-runner on the outside rails’.
then, of course, these people will want to immigrate much as the French Jews want to at present – not the old French families but those who have filtered in during the 1930s and 1950s. Are they to be stopped? If the frontiers are to be established, this should surely be enough. Nobody in their senses supposes that 11 million Jews can immigrate: if Zionism means that it is the duty of every Jew to go to Israel or be politically identified with it, then it is, of course, unacceptable & idiotic – even I have denounced this at no less an establishment than Isaac Stern’s Foundation in New York in the presence of Sidney and some exceedingly fanatical Zionists without being contradicted. […] I do not believe that there are propagandists who foam at the mouth in the Messianic manner and speak of the ingathering of all the Jews into a mighty kingdom spreading over Jordan, Syria, Egypt etc. from the Euphrates and the Nile. I think he is tilting at an enormous windmill, poor man, but if he has this image before him then I do not wonder that he strikes out at it. He is, in a sense, perfectly right in saying that Zionism as a movement has achieved its goal and should be declared fulfilled and obsolete – the rest, being properly left, is natural sentiment and desire to help, etc., as in America for Ireland of the 1920s, only more so […].

On the other hand, as far as rights of the dispossessed Arab natives are concerned, he pushed principle beyond reason. It is not a happy thing to be a minority. No doubt this shouldn’t be so and everyone should be very nice to everyone else and minorities should not have to claim rights, which should be accorded to them freely, generously etc., but we know that minorities suffer in some degree everywhere. Hence to increase the number of Arabs in Israel, by whatever means, seems to me to ask for misery for both sides. Ideally, of course, bi-nationalism would be splendid, but we know that this is not to be for, at any rate, half a century, while wounds heal. The wrongs of the refugees have to be weighed

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81 Sidney Morgenbesser (1921–2004), John Dewey Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University 1975–99; much prized by IB for his warmth and famous wit.
against the right (and even more the desirability) of making Israel a viable community. Hence, the laying down of any principle – that everyone born in what is now Israel’s territory should be allowed to come back; or that they should not be allowed to come back; or that all Jews have a right to come back in whatever numbers; or that only those whose mothers pass the religious test etc. should be allowed to come back; or any other generalisation whatever – seems to me likely to cut across actual concrete needs and situations and to draw blood unnecessarily. [...] This is true of some of the old leadership – e.g. the lady for whom you naturally care so little – they see their people as surrounded by implacable enemies; or by powers who will do nothing for them; they are suspicious of everyone, and want all their kinsfolk in every country to stand up and be counted, and devote themselves to one task and one only: the up-building of the State of Israel against all other claims, principles, ideals. These are the old, eschatological, post-Marxist pioneers whose analogues are old Marxists, Trotskyites, Maoists etc. etc. All that will pass. The possibly sometimes far less morally attractive, but politically and even morally saner, sabras and other un-inflamed characters, equidistant from Begin and Deutscher (who are very similar to each other in some ways, and were brought up under very similar conditions and with very similar ideals) will, if they are allowed to survive at all, come to terms with the Arabs; otherwise there will be awful slaughter. Bar Hillel’s appeal to the Great Powers to impose a solution is very German again. He is obviously a very decent, upright man but the imposition of any kind of rectilinear schema upon that tangled growth would be a terrible vivisection. [...] 

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

Yours ever,

[Isaiah]

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82 Hebrew term applied to Jews born in Israel.
*TO ROBERT SILVERS

19 March 1970

[Wolfson]

Dear Bob,

Thank you so much for your excellent letter of February 25 – if I have not replied before now this was due to the fact that I fell sick and was constantly in and out of bed for about three weeks. And now I must spring into intense activity – on Wednesday I have to preside over a lecture by our old friend, Scholem, who is lecturing about early Hassidism – what more terrible fate could be conceived for these simple-minded old holy rollers and shakers than to be dissected and scrutinised by a neurotic, contemptuous, old German Gelehrter? Do you think that what happened to the hippies and the Chicago Seven will one day be so treated? Which reminds me that George Lichtheim wishes to dine with Gerhard and Jean Floud and me – I have warned Aline that this will be too much for her – which reminds me: George has written an article in The Times Literary Supplement, it is impossible it should not be by him – on Habermas etc. – which is of monstrous length and is very polite about Popper who is very pleased, but apart from

83 Gershom Gerhard Scholem (1897–1982), German-born Israeli philosopher and historian widely regarded as the founder of the modern academic study of Kabbalah; first professor of Jewish Mysticism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

84 Seven defendants charged by the US federal government with conspiracy, incitement to riot, and other offences related to anti-Vietnam-War and countercultural protests that took place in Chicago during the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

85 George Lichtheim (1912–73), German-born Jewish intellectual who wrote on modern European history and the history of socialism and Marxism. He was indeed the author of ‘Marx or Weber? The New “Methodenstreit” in Postwar German Philosophy’, TLS, 12 March 1970, 269–72. TLS authors were then unnamed.

86 Jean Esther Floud (1915–2013) née McDonald, leading British educationalist and academic and a close friend of IB.

87 Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929), leading German philosopher and sociologist.
gossip about who were late and who were early pupils, and who owed what to whom, who answered whom when, there is absolutely no meat at all, so that while each individual sentence is quite clear and the quotations are quite well translated, absolutely nothing it says is either true, or false, or interesting, or dull, it was as if the old horse had been lured back into the circus, and is overwhelmed by the familiarity of all those figures and exclaims with pleasure at this clown or that, at this string of sausages, at a new trapeze act, and is prancing and snorting happily all over the place.

On Sunday morning I set off with Aline for New York where we arrive on Sunday afternoon – the Blackstone – and where I stay until the morning of the 25th when I fly to Ann Arbor then Columbus, then back to New York for the weekend, then Princeton, Philadelphia, then back to New York to some awful political conference summoned by Prof. Richter\(^88\) at which I am cut into very small pieces by Chuck Taylor\(^89\) summoned from Montreal especially for the occasion, so far as I can see. On this occasion, there appear R. Wolff\(^90\), Macpherson\(^91\), Ronnie Dworkin\(^92\), old uncle Plamenatz\(^93\) and all; I then deliver a rousing lecture on April 6, and back to Oxford on April 8 or maybe 9, where I collapse again. Hence I would rather talk about your Zionist theses when we meet. Is Elon coming? Can I have a talk with you and him and Sidney and Noam etc.? Very briefly I am in favour of rigorously demarcated frontiers, beyond which Israel will

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\(^88\) Melvin Richter (1921–2020), historian of political thought.

\(^89\) Charles Margrave (‘Chuck’) Taylor (b. 1931), Canadian philosopher whose doctoral studies were supervised by IB at Oxford; taught at Oxford and McGill.

\(^90\) Robert Paul Wolff (b. 1933), American political philosopher.

\(^91\) Crawford Brough Macpherson (1911–87), Canadian political philosopher and historian of ideas.

\(^92\) Ronald Myles (‘Ronnie’) Dworkin (1931–2013), US philosopher, jurist and legal scholar who taught at Harvard and at Oxford; a regular contributor to the NYRB.

\(^93\) John Plamenatz (1912–75), Montenegrin political philosopher who succeeded IB as Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford.
not be able to expand, to allay Arab fears. But not of controlled immigration because the moral basis of the state is not an asylum for refugees (who, as such, cannot claim a state) but the strange survival of a scattered community, which has mysteriously preserved national attributes, which survive but in a diseased form and breed terrible Steiner\(^{94}\)-Arendt\(^{95}\) fantasies, without a territorial base, and develop normally only if they are given it: as seems to have been shown in practice. My favourite Hess compares this to those grains of wheat found in Egyptian tombs which when replanted after 3,000 years, bloomed. It may, in a sense, be a great bore that this has happened, but it has. This being so one cannot ask a sovereign state to promise to limit its immigration; even though in fact, as you say, this makes no difference. There is a certain minimum of face which cannot be lost without inflicting too much collective humiliation. The Arabs of all people understand this excessively well. Internal chauvinism is another matter. I wish I thought that it is only a function of being beleaguered: even if it is, it will grow, which is a very bad prospect. Elon’s words in the *New York Review* seem to be perfectly right\(^{96}\) – what I do not believe is that the Arab States would have allowed this gradual trickling back, although to offer it would no doubt have been excellent for the record. Compensation should, of

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\(^{94}\) (Francis) George Steiner (1929–2020), British literary critic who wrote widely on Jewish culture and literature.

\(^{95}\) Hannah Arendt (1906–75), German-born American political philosopher best known for *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). IB was not an admirer of her or Steiner’s writings on the Holocaust.

\(^{96}\) Amos Sternbach Elon (1926–2009), Israeli journalist, author and regular contributor to the NYRB. In a review article written after the Six-Day War Elon observed: ‘Should there be a Jewish State? […] During the past decade this argument has become irrelevant and certainly impractical, and today it has become largely obsolete. Immigration to Israel has come to a standstill. Two-and-one-half million Israelis are now a nation, cohesive and resourceful, whatever the argument over Zionism. For Israelis, the issue is not one of theory, but one of physical survival, of individuals as well as of a community. There is no other place to go, as there was for the French community in Algeria’ (‘The Israel–Arab Deadlock’, NYRB, 1 August 1968, 14–20 at 14–15).
course, have been offered, and has been offered, but in so low a voice that nobody heard – this is what I said to Golda\(^{97}\) when you were there, and she made Eban\(^{98}\) say it again, but it was again said in somewhat muffled accents. I do not believe that the Arab nations would have rejected your individual re-emigrants; and I do not believe that after 1956 there was the slightest hope that the small minority of refugees would have been allowed to trickle back, and that this would have been regarded as sufficient, or that they would have been allowed to state freely what it is that they themselves wanted to do, or indeed that they would have known, subjected as they were (perhaps to some extent also as Jews in the refugee camps in Germany were in 1945–7) to steady propaganda, some of which they resented, but most of which they certainly swallowed quite naturally, too. I don’t think that Joseph Johnson\(^{99}\) – to whom you talked when he was there: he was a very amiable man – had any idea what would happen if a free choice were given to the refugees – his figures were perfectly reasonable if you assume that a real free choice could have been allowed these people. The probability of that, however, seems to me too low. Do you think that I over-estimate the pressure put on the refugees by their leaders, by agents of Arab States, etc.? I do not think so. The fact that they are used as political pawns does not make their condition less pitiable, or monstrous, and absolve Israel from their duty to offer to do something of a major kind for them. Israel’s major blunder, both moral and political, was, of course, after the Six Day War not to come out with some tremendously magnanimous proposal, whereby they declared themselves prepared to take back some reasonable numbers of refugees and offered to raise an enormous sum of money – far more than they

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\(^{98}\) Abba Eban (1915–2002), an Israeli diplomat and politician who served as Israel’s foreign affairs minister.

could possibly afford – something that would put them to genuine financial risk and strain the very existence of the State, if they are not to repatriate them in the empty parts of the Fertile Crescent. I do not doubt both these proposals would have been flung back in their faces by the Arabs, who by this time were, I think, in a totally exasperated and somewhat lunatic state – still, the offer would have been made and could have been repeated over and over again and perhaps might, in some form, have been accepted. This certainly would have eased the situation, morally, not only politically: what I do not believe in is that any large influx of Arabs into Israel could have ended in anything but the most terrible political indigestion, to put it at its lowest. That Jews cannot and should not govern Arabs seems to me absolutely plain. I do not believe in a peaceful symbiosis even under the most liberal idealistic administration, entirely consisting of Bar-Hillels\textsuperscript{100} and Lewontins.\textsuperscript{101} In the long run all kinds of things are possible, but it is in the short run that people suffer and die. Hence my general belief in partition, and distrust of artificially created multi-national and multi-racial states, however right they are in principle. This I am prepared to argue and argue. Of course the problem of Arabs in Palestine is something that the Jews have shut their eyes to in a very ostrich-like manner from the beginning. Maybe they can defend this, and of course the people who tried to preach a bi-national state, the decent old professors, Bentwich\textsuperscript{102} etc., plus one or two people in the left-wing Kibbutzim, were protesting against something very wrong and fatal, but there was something pathetic and remote about these people and their position – more like nice old anarchists, shaking their fists against the existence of the police and

\textsuperscript{100} Yehoshua Bar-Hillel (1915–75), Israeli philosopher; member of the left-wing Movement for Peace and Security formed after the Six Day War.

\textsuperscript{101} Richard Charles (‘Dick’) Lewontin (1929–2021), US evolutionary biologist and geneticist and social commentator; regular contributor to the NYRB.

\textsuperscript{102} Norman de Mattos Bentwich (1883–1971), British barrister and legal academic, was the British-appointed attorney general of Mandatory Palestine and a lifelong Zionist.
the army, and forbidding any violence against them, when obviously what had to be done was some radical transformation – the very partition scheme which Noam thinks so wicked, and indeed the United Nations resolutions of 1948\(^\text{103}\) which precipitated bloodshed which British policy had rendered unavoidable, it seems to me. If at this stage the frontiers of the United Nations Jewish Palestine had been guaranteed by the powers which were then on reasonably good terms with each other, if the United Nations then had sent troops against the advancing Arab armies as they did in Korea, the whole military growth of Israel need not have occurred, and the country could, I think, then have been neutralised and made into an Austria. Once it was clear that military adventures were to be tolerated in that part of the world, the Jews felt abandoned, looked for allies, went to Suez, took the West Bank, and did everything that people do who think that one false step on their part may lead to their total extinction. That they were morally obliged to recognise that they were responsible for the creation of refugees, and owed these people restitution, is clear, whether they fled of their own accord or were pushed over the border or whatever happened: politically I do not think it would have done them the slightest good. The desire to remove them, if need be by extermination on the part of Arabs – from the highest to the lowest, with the exception of the few politiques,\(^\text{104}\) Tunis, or Egypt, or Lebanon, or Morocco – was already at its height by the end of the 1930s. That is why I think that the plight of the refugees and the fate of the West Bank Arabs are human problems of the first order, which the Israelis are both morally wrong and unwise to try and push under the carpet. What

\(^{103}\) UN Security Council resolutions early in 1948 called for an end to violence in Palestine, and implementation of the General Assembly’s Resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947 (to which IB must here refer). This resolution proposed a plan for the partition of Palestine: it was accepted by the Jewish but not the Arab side, and the failure of either the British or the UN to enforce it contributed to the outbreak of hostilities that followed the termination of the British mandate at midnight on 14 May 1948.

\(^{104}\) ‘Unprincipled politicians’.
makes me pessimistic is the thought that even if they behaved with utter virtue their general prospects would not have been improved, no kind of gestures or even concrete acts will begin to melt the hatred of so many. When they say that it is the existence of the refugees that has created this, this, alas, is not true, plausible as it sounds. It exacerbated it, it gave it a focus, it created a heroic terrorist mentality, but the Arabs I talked to in Amman in 1934 – and certainly the Palestinian Arabs, Lebanese and even the Lebanese I met in 1947 were bubbling with hatred. I am still in favour of the Israelis evacuating the West Bank, or at any rate saying that they are prepared to do so on certain conditions; as for the creation of a Palestinian Arab political entity now in the bosom of Israel – that seems to me a pure Manchukuo, a puppet state which Fatah will either sabotage or take over, and whose resistance will be regarded as merely a piece of Israeli trickery any decent Arab was bound to reject with indignation. Am I mistaken? Is there really something that Israel can do today which will ensure both a degree of peace and [solve] the whole problem of survival? I wish I thought so.

Yours,

[Isaiah]

PS I am glad that I shall see you soon. Stephen’s letter about dinner with you and Stuart and the Lowells was most exhilarating.

TO HAYME MARANTZ

28 May 1970

Wolfson College

Dear Mr Marantz,

Thank you very much for your letter of 22 May. I am glad that you think that the principle of the incompatibility of values clears up Machiavelli’s position. I do, indeed, think so too: and did about

105 The puppet State maintained by Japan in Manchuria (north-east China and inner Mongolia) 1932–45 in order to legitimate Japanese military conquest and colonial exploitation of that region.
five years ago read a paper to this effect which was mimeographed (to the British Political Studies Association, which met in Oxford)\textsuperscript{106} and propose to send this paper, amended (I have by now spoken to a good many universities in this sense in public lectures), to a symposium on Machiavelli to be published under the auspices of a Harvard Foundation in Florence.\textsuperscript{107} There I work out the very positions that you have, unaided, reached in the course of your short, but very penetrating, note to me. If I can lay my hand on my original mimeographed sheet, I will send it to you. My thesis is indeed that Machiavelli was virtually the first person to declare (without doing so explicitly) that there were two incompatible moralities – the Christian and what he represented as the Graeco-Roman – and that not only rulers, but presumably citizens too, had to choose between them, for they were conceptually incompatible, not merely unrealisable [together] in practice. He thought, as you know, that one could restore the past – that the Roman republic could be restored with enough will, energy, resources. As for whether a Christian way of life could be realised, he, it seems to me, neither knew nor cared, but, I suspect, thought this quite impractical, given human nature as it must unalterably be. So my conclusion was that Croce was wrong in saying that Machiavelli divided politics from morals, for what he divided was one moral world from another – not at all the same thing. That this is the application of what you are kind enough to call my insight to the problem of The Prince and the Discourses I fully realised when I wrote the paper. I seem to myself to be always saying the same thing.

Yours sincerely,

Isaiah Berlin

\textsuperscript{106} IB’s paper was read on 26 March 1963 at the conference of the Political Studies Association held at Exeter College, Oxford, on 25–7 March. The date of 1953 that he assigned to it when it was first published, in a volume marking the 500th anniversary of Machiavelli’s birth – as “The Originality of Machiavelli”: Myron P. Gilmore (ed.), Studies on Machiavelli (Florence, 1972), 149–206 – is an error. The essay is reprinted with many corrections in AC.

\textsuperscript{107} Villa I Tatti, The Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, of which Gilmore (previous note) was Director 1964–73.
*TO ROBERT SILVERS

29 May 1970

[Wolfson College]

Dear Bob,

I feel that some kind of report is owing to you by this time. [...] Sir Maurice telephoned to me, saying, ‘Bad news. Mrs Stone, wife of Lawrence Stone, told Stuart that he was not wanted in Wadham and spread stories about the hostile reception that is waiting for him.’ Absolute nonsense. We are all most eager. The only person who is hostile is Stone’s friend Pat Thompson, who is mad, enraged, determined to make trouble. I hope Stuart believes none of this. I have told Thompson what I think of him. He made a scene, etc. [...] One man can do a lot of harm and inflict a lot of wounds, and this, I fear, may happen. However, in the end, Stuart’s beauty of character will (I know this to be an incontrovertible truth) quell opposition. Still, it was not entirely without a certain mild maliciousness – I will not say pleasure, but interest – that Sir Maurice communicated this horrid intelligence to me. It is, on the whole, best that you not know it, otherwise it will be thought a kind of spreading story; Stuart will think there is more in this than meets the eye; Renée will think that there is a campaign, etc., none of which is true. But it is as I thought about Stone – happy in Princeton he may be, and it may not be his fault so much as his awful wife’s, but a certain envy grips all academics at a certain stage of their life, particularly those who, having failed in a given place, observe others succeeding in what they regard as their own particular preserve. None of this is news.

Secondly, Cal: I think all is well. He began by rather disliking Sparrow, and still dislikes All Souls, the dinner jackets on Saturdays, the fact that it is all too much like school, too much silly formality and general nonsense. But I am sure he is right to take...

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

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

Yours ever,

[Isaiah]

TO ROBERT SILVERS


Dear Bob,

It was extremely nice to see you in Paraggi – do come to see us in Oxford in the autumn & let us know – here I am taking a 19th century Cure in a 19th century établissement: but then I am a 19th century man, at least I long to return to Mazzini & Michelet, if not
actually to Wagner & Marx. Martin Malia & Stuart will be upon us at any minute now: time was when Martin was to the left of Stuart: but visits to Moscow, even more than students, have driven him into ferocious defence of learning & rigid academic scruples against populism of any kind: which makes Stuart uncomfortable. If you want to look at something which really made me sick – & which Noam ought to see – look at the quotidian Libanais Le Jour (Beirut 6th August) which prints an interview with Jean Luc Godard on his forthcoming film Jusqu’à la victoire which he defines as the destruction of Israel by El Fattah.109 I wish I didn’t get so worked up: but the thought of another (Russian) jackboot on the Jews – however sinful or mistaken, destroys all hope of anything. Yet the old sadistic O.T. God is quite capable of such Caligula like behaviour. Can you console me?

Isaiah.

TO ROBERT SILVERS

9 April 1971

Headington House

Dear Bob

Stuart is well. He says that Steiner’s T. S. Eliot lectures, printed in the Listener are a huge success & quite terrible. Why is this? The elevation of Sir S. Zuckerman & R. Blake to peerages are also

An article, not an interview: Jean-Luc Godard (b. 1930), ‘“Les idées détruiront l’État d’Israël”’ [‘“Ideas will destroy the state of Israel”’], Le Jour, 6 August 1970, 4. The ‘quotation’ used as the title derives from this sentence in Godard’s text: ‘Que plus la marche sur Tel-Aviv sera longue, plus les idées changeront, qui permettront de détruire enfin l’État d’Israël’ [‘The longer the march on Tel-Aviv, the more ideas will change, and they will make it possible finally to destroy the state of Israel’]. For the Palestinian political party El Fattah (usually called ‘Fatah’ in English) and for Godard, the ‘victory’ of the film’s title (Until Victory) is the destruction of Israel. After most of the fedayeen who were to appear in the film were killed by Jordanian soldiers in the 1970 Black September conflict, the film was left uncompleted, but much of its footage was incorporated into Ici et ailleurs [Here and Elsewhere] (1974).
subjects of wry comment. Solly cannot now be stopped till he attains a dukedom. Reactions to these honours are worthy of some very acid satirist. Equally Sir Maurice’s, & Sparrow’s.

I enclose a letter for R. Craft whose 5th Av. address I have alas forgotten. I shall telephone on the 15th –

yrs
Isaiah.

TO ROBERT SILVERS

1 September [1971] [manuscript]

Paraggi

Dear Bob,

Thank you for everything: letters, proofs\textsuperscript{110} (can you really want to print it \textit{all}? What will your readers say! I can just hear some of them exclaiming, & justly, I fear, that there is a limit to learned logorrhoea – I’ve corrected \textit{very} little – Stuart has been over it & dissipated it a tiny bit too; at the moment he is here, so are Marietta & Roy Jenkins; R.J. is amiable & civilized & a little cagey: but he is what is called a very good, undemanding, unpompous guest. Marietta does, I suspect, pine for a little more social life than we provide: Stuart & Malia are very funny together: Malia is excited by Stuart’s left wing sentiments, Stuart suitably shocked by Malia’s religion & academic conservatism. They get on; & Sparrow will be here at any moment – & then Gaby Cohen from Israel, & then Cyprus & so it goes on. I wish you came to Cyprus: it will be even odder than the Diaghilev–Stravinsky memorial service which we went to – by the anti-Stravinskian black lifewriter: Bob Craft has written me two very sad & touching letters – he must not know that we ever in the same motoscafo as the hated Lifar. I hear you read

an essay on Fathers & Sons by Turgenev’s editor & later enemy, Mikhail Katkov, written in about 1862: very nasty & intelligent: his chief points being that Bazarov & the nihilists, so far from attacking rhetoric, phrases, pretty words, embellished life – in the name of the bleak stern truth, science, ruthless realism, harsh candour, are themselves phrase-mongers: what they peddle is not science – there are no real students [of] science in Russia – but popular science invoking trash – Büchner, Moleschott, Vogt: not chemistry or physics, but tracts which misuse popular scientific slogans for social & political radicalism: & the nihilism is more anti-intellectual revolt against true knowledge, reason etc – & has no positive programme, only crude barbarous cries against civilization, decency etc – partly due to the protestors being the children of clergymen – priests – an ignorant degenerate caste, with no vocation, isolated from life & suffocating its progeny. Reactionary & interesting stuff – must be best right wing criticism of the shy liberalism of the middle roaders: Turgenev’s terror of the young, exaggerated fear of being unfair to them is itself represented as leading to a distortion of the truth which a braver & more independent rationalist would state less tremulously. Malia drank it all up. When do we meet? I am very glad you are in love. It is a heavenly condition, whatever its difficulties & agonies – & when it ceases the owl of Athena really does come down, & life writes its grey on grey, as old Georg Hegel (as Italians call him) once said –

Love

Isaiah

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

IB
TO GEORGE WEIDENFELD

21 October 1971

Wolfson College

Dear George,

I really am grateful to you. Meyer [Weisgal] read to me this morning the text of the appropriate passage, which, whether it corresponded to the facts or not, does at any rate eliminate what appeared to me to be an entirely imaginary account of his first meeting with me. In fact I met Meyer in 1940 and not 1942, and we were introduced by Arthur Lourie. He came to see me once or twice in 1941 about things like the Struma, Patria etc., with and

111 For the background to this letter, see the letters to GW of 29 October and 1 November below.
112 Meyer Wolf Weisgal (1894–1977), Polish-born Zionist, emigrated to US 1905; editor of books and newspapers, producer of plays; national secretary of Zionist Organization of America 1921–38; Secretary General of US section of Jewish Agency for Palestine 1940–6; Organising Secretary of American Jewish Conference 1943; Chaim Weizmann’s personal political representative in the US.
113 Arthur Lourie (1903–78), South African lawyer, political secretary of the Jewish Agency in London 1933–48 (for part of this time under Chaim Weizmann), a Zionist activist in the US during the war.
114 The desperate desire of many European Jews to reach Palestine, and the reluctance of other countries, particularly Britain, to allow this, led to a number of marine disasters. In November 1940, 3,600 East European Jews reached Haifa in three ships, only to find that the British classed them as illegal immigrants and proposed to deport them to Mauritius on board the Patria. While the refugees were being transferred between ships, Haganah agents (led by IB’s cousin Yitzhak Sadeh, E 29/5) mined the Patria in an attempt to disable it. The explosion was more powerful than intended: of the nearly 270 dead, over 200 were refugees. Initially the Irgun (E 12/5) were suspected and the Haganah’s role was revealed only years later. The Struma was an unseaworthy ship chartered in 1941 by Revisionist Zionists in Romania to carry nearly 800 illegal Jewish immigrants to Palestine. The ship broke down in the Black Sea but managed to reach Istanbul. Weeks of argument between Turkey and Britain followed about whether, and if so how, any passengers would be allowed into Palestine;
without Mr Louis Lipsky.\textsuperscript{115} So that the scene at which Dr W[eizmann] first introduces him to me is entirely apocryphal. But that is not, of course, what worries me most: I thought that if the original version were kept anywhere where it might be seen by an unfriendly, or even an amused, eye, it would suggest a degree of irresponsibility on my part, and could by unfriendly persons be interpreted as positive disloyalty, a charge which would almost certainly be generalised, and used over and over again. The only way in which I could stop this would be by suing Meyer for libel—not a course of action I could dream of undertaking, save for the sake of public interest. I imagine that this must have been a fearful nuisance to you, and must have cost a good bit. If so, would you allow me to make a contribution towards it? I should be very glad to do this as it relieves me from a sense of nightmare. It really is appalling to think that one is perpetually menaced by total invention on the part of perfectly well-disposed persons. Do let me know what you would like me to do, and in the meanwhile once again let me offer you my warmest gratitude.

Yours ever,

Isaiah

\textbf{TO MEYER WEISGAL}

29 October 1971

Wolfson College

Dear Meyer,

This is \textit{purely} for George’s files and will go no further. I merely thought I ought to record this, just in case by some hideous meanwhile almost all remained aboard. On 23 February 1942 Turkey towed the still-helpless ship back into the Black Sea. The next day the ship exploded, leaving one survivor. Later information suggests it was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine acting under orders to sink all neutral shipping in the Black Sea to prevent goods reaching Germany.

\textsuperscript{115} Louis Lipsky (1876–1963), Polish-born US Zionist leader, journalist and author; President, Zionist Organization of America, 1922–30.
accident your story sees the light – in Jerusalem, in London, in New York, or wherever. I realise, of course, that you do not think it nearly so grave as I do, but believe me I am right, and {that} the fact that I am innocent would not prevent ill-wishers from exploiting your statement in all kinds of ways which I leave to your fertile (in this case, I fear, slightly over-fertile) imagination. Let me offer you renewed devotion, and warmest friendship as always.

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah

<Just give this to Rinna\(^{116}\) to hide: & I shall sleep soundly.>

TO GEORGE WEIDENFELD

1 November 1971

Wolfson College

Dear George,

When I saw him at the Dorchester a few days ago, my friend Meyer Weisgal showed me a copy of his memoirs, which your firm is to publish. He told me that he mentioned me in his book several times, and proceeded to read one of the relevant passages to me. I am not sure what other mentions of me the book contains, but the only passage that I came across horrified me. The substance of it, so far as I recollect, was that the late Dr Chaim Weizmann introduced me to MW in New York in 1942; that when I heard his name, I pulled out a little pocketbook and said something to the effect that I knew who he was, he was number something or other, which I pretended to read out, and that he was in correspondence with ‘a chap called Agronsky’ and that his letters were opened by the British censorship in London and sent on to the addressee. From this MW had learnt for the first time that his letters to Mr

\(^{116}\) Rinna Samuel (1921–2014) née Grossman, journalist, editor and author then working for the Weizmann Institute of Science at Rehovot, where she edited the Institute’s magazine, Rehovot.
Agronsky were, in fact, intercepted – something he did not know before, and was obviously interested to learn.

I should like to make it clear that this story is not so much inaccurate as totally devoid of foundation; that it did not merely not occur, but could not have occurred for reasons given below; and that, in fact, it must rest on a total lapse of memory on the part of our friend Meyer Weisgal. I do not wish to blame him in any way for saying something that he evidently believed to be true: but I wish to record the fact that it is wholly imaginary and obviously exceedingly damaging to myself. Such indiscretion, particularly in wartime, is rightly regarded as culpable in the extreme, even if its motives are not sinister. The impression given is that I casually passed on a piece of secret information illicitly to a friend of a man whom I admired; the information may have been trivial, but this does not make the breach of both duty and principle less discreditable, in my view. Anyone reading this passage would rightly regard me as lacking in loyalty and discretion, or both.

Now, as to the facts. I was, in fact, introduced to Meyer Weisgal not in 1942, but in 1940; in Washington, by Arthur Lourie, whom I had known before the war and who was at that time working for the Jewish Agency in the United States. In 1941, Meyer Weisgal called on me on at least two occasions to protest about the Struma and Patria incidents, and I remember very clearly reading to him Lord Cranborne’s statement in the House of Commons, which somewhat allayed his natural indignation. By 1942, he therefore knew me well enough not to have to be introduced to me by anyone. As for the comic turn with the little book, and the ‘number’ which MW imputes to me, I cannot, of course, recollect doing any such thing, but one’s memory is fallible, and although I do not like to believe that I made so fatuous a joke, it is harmless and I cannot, and do not propose to bother to try and, disprove it. What is inconceivable (and not merely imaginary) is that I should have mentioned a correspondent of MW to whom I discovered that he had been writing through intercepted letters. I never worked for any intelligence agency, either during the war or at any
other time. So far as I recollect, I have never in my life seen any document that came from an intelligence agency. Nor was I connected in any way with censorship, intercepts or anything of this kind. I therefore could not have possessed the piece of information which I am held to have divulged. Hence my certainty that the story is without foundation rests not merely on my own memory but on conclusive evidence.

I should like to record all this, since if the story were published it would represent me in a highly unfavourable light and, for all I know, make me liable to official prosecution. The fact that I am totally innocent of what has been attributed to me does not offer me any other than private moral comfort. Since my reputation is not a matter of total indifference to me, I should be greatly obliged if this figment were eliminated from the book. I have no doubt that Meyer Weisgal will be only too glad to do this, as he is a friend of the truth and not merely to you and me, and that you will be similarly minded. I hope I have made my position entirely clear, and that neither he nor you will think that I am making a mountain out of a molehill.

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah Berlin

TO JEAN HALPÉRIN

18 November 1971

Wolfson College

Mon Cher Cousin,

First of all forgive me for this coldly typed letter, but my handwriting is now beyond the powers of even the most expert cryptographers.

Let me tell you how very, very distressed I was to hear that your brother was no more. He came to see us in Oxford, as you know,
and I found him charming and civilised, and delightful to talk to. Indeed this applies to your entire family: you know well what I think of it. There is never anything to say when genuinely tragic events occur, so forgive me if I do not go on. Every time I go and see my aged mother I tremble about this very thing. Some people welcome the approach of the end: especially those who are very tired of life and simply want to close their eyes for ever; but I have never felt this. Perhaps one day I shall – indeed I hope I do. It is a terrible thing to see people die who are still full of life and passionately desire to go on living. Myself, if I could do it, I should confer immortality on everyone – this is regarded as a horrifying idea by many people, but not by me. I will not go on, except to say that I send you my warmest possible feelings, and that on no account must you acknowledge this ever, in writing or in any other way, but only believe me. [...]  

Yours ever,  

Isaiah

TO ROBERT SILVERS

27 February 1974

Wolfson

Dear Bob,

Thank you very much indeed for your letter. You are perfectly right about the effect upon me of my mother’s death. Although she was ninety-four and died peacefully and recognised no one before she died, yet it is as if a large part of the framework within which I live had suddenly disappeared overnight, leaving me exposed to winds and indefinable forces. But the whole of my childhood, the very firm framework in which I was brought up, which was a very conscious part of myself until now, has suddenly receded into some kind of historical past – is now broken off by a kind of gulf and has become somewhat abstract. This is very

118 On 3 February 1974.
strange and unsettling and I cannot get used to it at all. Being an orphan at the age of sixty-four is ridiculous, but it is precisely what I feel. […]

Soon, soon we meet, that makes me very happy.

Yours ever,
Isaiah

TO ROBERT SILVERS

5 April 1974

Headington House

Dear Bob,

[…] The *Daily Express* has started a campaign against Wilson’s personal honesty, plainly modelled on Watergate. I somehow doubt if such things can be duplicated successfully, but, as the British Embassy used to say, and most of its reflective pieces used to end, ‘the future alone will show’, which they sometimes varied with ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating’.

What a marvellous time we had together in New York. Truly!

〈It is the greatest pleasure to Aline & me –〉

Yours ever,
Isaiah

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On 21 April 1974 Sam Sebba\(^\text{119}\) wrote to IB about Marie Berlin’s death:

I felt the need to write to you – not to commiserate nor to convey to you any of the conventional words of comfort and courage – but to say how lucky we, the sons of that generation of Russian Jewish Matriarchs, were. They had those outgoing dispositions which radiated charm and confidence, happiness and an unceasing ‘joie de

\(^{119}\) Sam Sebba (1915–2003), came from Riga like IB and knew him before they met at Oxford, where Sebba read law at St John’s 1934–7, and took his turn as President of the Jewish Society. Like IB, he attended St Paul’s School.
vivre’; and above all they knew how to bridge the generation gap, to inspire the young with a sense of security, and to imbue them with worldly wisdom; and even though, in their later years, some of them may perhaps have been a little exasperating – as indeed my late Mother was during her last illness – they must surely be remembered for all those outstanding qualities which endeared them during their lifetime, lived to the full.

On arrival in England at the age of ten, I was taken to your Mother’s house in the Addison Road area and to Ida’s flat in Sinclair Road; what better introduction could a young boy have had – to inspiration and example, to devotion and thought, and what better memories can remain after nearly 50 years?

TO SAM SEBBA

29 April 1974

Headington House

Dear Sam,

[…] You are quite right. We were lucky. Our mothers were conceived in a firm, and indeed heroic, mould; they had positive values of a kind that, despite all our sophistication and the changes and reversals through which we have lived, still linger in you and me – perhaps more than linger – as we grow older I suspect we grow closer to them, not further. The security was extraordinary; the moral and social and personal values were warm-hearted, positive, life-enhancing, and above all held with not only unswerving firmness but with immense courage which overcame all resistance and all crises. Our mothers were certainly exasperating at times; they bullied us without wishing to do so; they failed to understand our doubts and deviations; but even that gave one a firm standard to judge things by; when we deviated, we knew at least what we were deviating from, and how far, and why. This

120 33 Upper Addison Gardens and 57 Sinclair Road, near to one another and to St Paul’s School in London W14. Ida Samunov (1887–1985) née Volshonok, IB’s aunt (younger sister of Marie Berlin), was widowed after the death of her husband Yitzhak Samunov (1886–1950), with whom she had emigrated to Palestine in 1934.
is why a good many persons without a moral base of their own tended to join e.g. the Communist Party in the 1930s – we were fortunate not to be tempted to march with that inhuman battalion. And so far as there is a moral base in Israel, it surely comes from this Russian Jewish culture, which those who have not actually grown up in it cannot, I am sure, fully understand. I see that Laqueur\textsuperscript{121} is to write the life of Dr Weizmann: he was exactly like that, too – he belonged to the generation of our parents and his immense confidence and dignity, and monolithic quality, came from precisely these roots: Laqueur will not convey this – we shall get a perfectly sound record of his public activities, but as a conception of character it will – at least by you and me, and a few other such – be found painfully lacking, I am sure.

How well do I remember your visits to us – in Upper Addison Gardens and Sinclair Road – that talk we had about Napoleon once, based on a book by Sheridan Somebody,\textsuperscript{122} which you were reading at the time. Sinclair Road! That really does dredge up marvellous memories. Ida is, as you know, still alive, in Jerusalem – next time I go there I shall tell her about your letter and memories of that particular past. I was profoundly moved by your letter, and most grateful for it, and wish we could see each other sometime; do you never come to Oxford?

Yours,

Isaiah

\textsuperscript{121} Walter Ze’ev Laqueur (1921–2018), prolific US historian born in Germany. He did not publish a biography of Weizmann.

\textsuperscript{122} Untraced.
TO JOHN HABAKKUK

12 May 1974 [carbon copy sent to John Sparrow]

[Headington House]

Dear Mr Vice-Chancellor,

May I inform you that I intend to retire from my post as President of Wolfson College in the course of the academic year 1974–5, most probably before the beginning of Trinity Term 1975, but in any case before the beginning of Michaelmas Term of that year. This decision has been made known to the Governing Body of the College, and I understand that it proposes shortly to submit the name of the person whom it would wish to recommend as my successor for the consideration, in the first instance, of the Trustees of Wolfson College, and, if approved by them, to the Hebdomadal Council for its consideration. The Vice-Gerent of the College will doubtless be in communication with yourself on this matter in due course.

Yours sincerely,

[Isaiah Berlin]

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

Do advise me,

I.B.
TO ROBERT SILVERS

[Early September 1974, manuscript]

Dear Bob,

Leonard Schapiro (1908–83) at St Paul’s School in 1926: he and IB were contemporaries there

Yes, of course, you are right about Leonard S[chapiro]’s attitude: it is only that to be a legitimist now, and believe that revolutions are avertible by the ‘charisma’ of royal descent, has a quaint ancien régime innocence about it, which sits curiously on a great grandchild of the ghetto (as opposed to my lot, & I daresay yours, i.e. grandchildren). But of course he is preferable to mechanical university reviewers or journalists; the interest & almost sympathy for Bukharin stems from his image as Danton vis a vis Stalin as Robespierre (or much worse) – and the fact that he was not a rootless cosmopolitan, almost an intellectual, and appealable to by Mme Mandelstamm etc. – which still doesn’t single him [out] for me: what is [sc. does] his reputation as a theorist of note depend on? Have you tried to read his theoretical works? I
know, as the Russian proverb says, where there is no fish, a crab will count as a fish: but still, compared even to Parvus or Gramsci it is all nothing at all. Still, Leonard is preferable to Chr[istopher] Hill on the Russians – the review of Ulam\textsuperscript{123} was a non-review: poor Tucker is harmless to the movement, but Ulam has some bite: he made it all sound old hat Marxophage patter which it is far from being: it has a flavour of its own.

We were visited by Lord & Lady Drogheda – I rather think they found conditions a bit rough: not villa-like enough, during their ten days: then Malia & Momigliano: (we led off with Hart & Mrs Floud) the former, as always, full of original points of his own – e.g. the Slavophils’ (& Dostoevsky’s particular) debt to sentimental German pietism for which all the stuff about the Greek Fathers of the Church is a mere facade (70% true at least), and denunciations of Althusser as a fraud (I suspect true) and the Frankfurt school as an ocean of undehydratable verbiage (music to my ears) – & Arnaldo who reported on the fact that Peter Brown has left his wife (who is very nice & sympathetic), has received offers from the Princeton Institute & 7 other U.S. institutes + London University – what will he do? The only two true jewels in the All Souls crown are Dummett & he: both thought tedious bores by the Warden; Mom[igliano] coached me carefully about the lectures I am to give in Venice on the 11\textsuperscript{th}, whom to like whom to hiss at (nasty ex-fascist clericals etc.) – I am v. nervous of lecturing in my English to Italian laureati, what is the good of being so old, & Brit. Academy etc., if one trembles before “foreign” students – and Italian academics? Stuart was here too. – he has no more natural authority or Gombrich-like weightiness than I. Richard passed by – gay & with a marvellous gift for turning all his friends and acquaintances into figures in a Rossini–Anatole France comedy. His twins were gay too.\textsuperscript{124}


\textsuperscript{124} Richard Wollheim had twin sons.
TO JEAN HALPÉRIN
20 September 1974

Cher Cousin,

Thank you very much for – in the first place – your wife’s charming and moving obituary of Milhaud. I admired him greatly as a man, and listened with great pleasure to his works, particularly the early ones; those written in the last twenty years of his life seemed to me fluent, eloquent, warm-hearted, highly civilised episodic writing – not musical journalism exactly, but an outflow of rich but not very self-critical talent. But perhaps I am mistaken: perhaps he is a greater composer than I think, and {that} your wife is right – that he was indeed the greatest living composer after Stravinsky – Stravinsky himself was, as always, ironical about his, as he was about all his contemporaries’, works; he preferred Boulez year
— perhaps because he was younger and remoter from himself. He had nothing but scathing remarks about Les Six – but then he was scathing about Wagner and Berlioz and at times Beethoven too, so that does not count.

Thank you also for telling me about Boussidan – I shall certainly try and look at his Haggadah 125 next time I am in London. I have had a letter about this from Tammuz 126 – I am most grateful for his suggestion.

125 Haggadah, etchings by the painter, printer and calligrapher Ya’akov Boussidan (b. 1939), illustrating the text of the Haggadah and verses from Genesis, was exhibited worldwide, and published in facsimile in Tel Aviv in 1967.

126 Benjamin Tammuz (1919–89), Israeli artist and writer, contributed an introduction to Boussidan’s etchings.
SUPPLEMENTARY LETTERS 1960–1975

Yours ever,  
Isaiah

‘Happy New Year ט"ח!ʼ127

Ya’akov Boussidan

127 [usually sic] (‘KVCH''T’) is an acronym of ‘KTIVAH V’CHATIMAH TOVAHʼ (‘ktivah v’chatimah tovah’, ‘A good writing and sealing’), a traditional Jewish New Year’s greeting referring to the belief that on Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) God’s judgements of our conduct in the old year are written in a Book of Life, and on Yom Kippur, after ten days of repentance, they are sealed in it.
TO JOSEPH BRODSKY

30 September 1974

Headington House

Mileishii,

I would prefer to write in Russian too, but since my handwriting is indecipherably illegible and I have no Russian typewriter available, we are reduced to ‘business English’, as you rightly call it.

Piatigorsky: I am only too ready to help, having heard about him from many quarters, but my college pays no one anything except one or two academic officials who also teach elsewhere, etc. All my colleagues are paid by the University and not by the College. But if even some degree of hospitality would help him I will do my best to persuade my college to do something about that. The only objection is that if he does become a member of my College, other colleges, which could pay him, will find it only too easy to avert their gaze from him on the ground that he already has a college connection, etc. I will not go on bothering you with all this bureaucratic fatras.

And now I must go to the Auden commemorations. I am ready to go to Westminster Abbey, where a memorial will be put up to him in Poets’ Corner, with Byron, Tennyson etc. – he would have thought this satisfactory. I shall not, however, attend a reading of his verses plus a chorus singing a setting of his poems composed by Britten – the only friend with whom he irrevocably quarrelled. I do not think that he would actually have minded even that – he

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128 Iosif/Joseph Aleksandrovich Brodsky (1940–96), poet; born in Leningrad into a Jewish family; recognised by Anna Akhmatova as the most gifted lyric poet of his generation; sentenced to internal exile in the Archangelsk region for ‘social parasitism’ 1964–5; involuntary exile from the USSR 1972, settling in America; poet in residence and visiting prof. at Michigan, Columbia, Cambridge and elsewhere; Five College Prof., Mount Holyoke, 1986–96; Nobel Prize in Literature 1987.

129 ‘Dearest’.

130 ‘Tangle’.
did not object to tributes – but equally he would have forgiven such old friends as myself the avoidance of gratuitous embarrassment. Stephen Spender is organising it, inevitably; but I have no doubt his attitude towards it will be as sympathetically ironical as yours, mine or Auden’s own.

How are you? When are you coming here again?

Yours – на веки вечные
Isaiah B.

TO ROBERT SILVERS

10 December 1974

Headington House

Dear Bob,

I can imagine the Eban meeting very well: he delivered a much more fiery address, ostensibly on Weizmann, in fact to an imaginary crowd filling Madison Square Gardens, in fact in London, to some 150 members of the Hampstead Jewish bourgeoisie, totally converted, who cheered his every word. I proposed a vote of thanks in what was, I fear, considered insufficiently dramatic and rather too unconcerned a fashion, which did not rise to the full horror of the crisis. Perhaps they were right: but the temptation to deflate the conventional rhetoric can be very strong. Yet the crisis is genuine, and the Jews do well to be terribly worried.

I long to see you. We shall be in London (Albany) on 16, 17 and 18 December, and I return to Oxford on the morning of the 19th, when I have to attend interviews for a Fellow in Mathematical Logic from 1 o’clock till 6 p.m., and at 6.30 I have to go into ‘conference’ with my successor, Harry Fisher, until 8 p.m. On the 20th you leave for New York, and Rostropovich arrives to give a concert at Wolfson. At the crack of dawn on the 21st Stuart and I and the Spenders and the Annans fly off you know where. So time

131 ‘Na veki vechnye’ (‘For ever and ever’).
is short: but it is unthinkable that we shd not meet for a proper period of time.

Would you dine and sleep the night on the 19th? If you want to see Stuart, could you contrive to come to Oxford earlier that day and see him before dinner? We could ask him to dinner, but I should somewhat prefer to keep you to ourselves – though this is not imperative if you cannot see him at any other time and want to do so. The only other time I would have free would be between 12 p.m. and 6 p.m. in London on the 18th, if you would prefer that. Let me know which and I shall act accordingly.

Yours ever,

Isaiah

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

TO BRYAN MAGEE

7 January 1975

Headington House

Dear Bryan,

Your p.c.\textsuperscript{132} to hand. I myself am by now totally confused about your position on Israel. Are your alternatives ‘secular state’, i.e. dissolution, versus extinction? – the last merely being a more savage form of the former. Or is Resolution 242\textsuperscript{133} the alternative? I have talked to some tough doves in Israel, who seemed to me entirely reasonable and very moderate indeed. But the issue of the Union\textsuperscript{134} is surely whether Israel should commit suicide or not?

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\textsuperscript{132} Not found.

\textsuperscript{133} United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, adopted 22 November 1967 after the Six-Day War, called for Israel’s withdrawal from the occupied territories.

\textsuperscript{134} On 13 February 1975 an ‘Arab–Israeli Debate’ was held at the Oxford Union. The motion was ‘That Israel should be replaced by a secular state of
The Union did, I am told, invite one or two notoriously doveish Israelis here to speak, but they refused, I think rightly, to discuss the question of whether it would be best for Israel to disappear. I have no idea who the main speakers are. You know what happened in Cambridge last term on this?

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

Yours sincerely,
Isaiah

Magee responded on 10 January:

My dear Isaiah,

My position on Israel is the same as it always was. I can oversimplify it in four sentences. Sentence one: Although the creation of Israel was a great wrong against the Arabs, and ought not to have happened, there is no practically acceptable way in which it can now be undone. Sentence two: The most desirable thing, therefore, is that the Arabs should accept the continued existence of Israel. Sentence three: The fact has to be faced, however, that this is to ask more than most human beings generally, and Arabs in particular, find tolerable, and therefore would have to be balanced by massive concessions to the Arabs by Israel, bigger than anything they have yet been prepared to contemplate. Sentence four: Only the kind of deal outlined in my sentences two and three, involving as it does huge sacrifices by both sides, can ensure both the survival of Israel and the attainment of peace in the Middle East.

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

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

Yours sincerely,

Bryan

Palestine.’ The main speakers were Said Hammami, British spokesman for the Palestine Liberation Organization, and BM.
TO BRYAN MAGEE

15 January 1975

Dear Bryan,

Thank you for your letter. I do not believe your position to be founded on rational grounds, but then perhaps Dr Popper is right after all and no value judgements can in principle be so. But if you really believe that the United Nations committed a grave crime in 1948, and that, after all that had happened between 1933 and 1945, it was the lesser evil to leave the Jews in Palestine to the mercies of the Arabs (for this was the only feasible alternative – and was, in fact, the one adopted), which would have deprived Israel of the only claim to legitimacy that it could possibly possess – then, I think, you should change your position on [the?] racing card [sic], and explain that you support the position of the more moderate followers of Arafat. Otherwise you will ensure that the gap between you and any other opponents of the motion will be so wide as to create inevitable confusion in their ranks – and that is something that they have a right to protect themselves from. In short, I shall not argue about your position, from which I am sure that you cannot be shifted by perception of either facts or the moral consequences of the policy you advocate. But I do think that your allies could well exclaim ‘Non tali auxilio, non defensoribus istis’135 – the least you can do is to warn them of the line you are likely to take – if you told this to the other side too, they may not bother to speak, since I have no doubt whatever that you could put their case, at least three-quarters of it, far more persuasively – I mean convincingly and ably and sincerely, and without the emotional claptrap which on some occasions both sides are apt to employ.

135 Vergil, Aenid 2. 521. The beginning of the next line, ‘tempus eget’, is understood: ‘The occasion does not need help of that kind or defenders such as those.’
All foreign rule is hateful. But do you feel similar emotions about Poes in Germany, the Czechs in German Bohemia, the Iraqis in Kurdistan, the Poles in Danzig, etc.? Do you think that the millions of displaced persons of 1945–6 should or could go back to their original homes? But there – I promised not to argue. At the Athenaeum we must discuss why it is that even the universities in England look so contemptuously upon the arts and honour them so seldom, and when they do, so capriciously (e.g. Oxford this year).

Yours,
Isaiah

TO ROBERT SILVERS

30 January 1975

Headington House

Dear Bob,

I am inclined to send this\footnote{IB enclosed a copy of a draft letter to Stone dated 28 January 1975, of which a slightly revised version, dated 13 February 1975, appears (with cuts) at B 589–92.} to Izzy, but do not wish to offend him or draw even the tiniest droplet of blood. I imagine he is, where Jews are concerned, incurable, feeling as he does that his love for them justifies him in hitting Zionists on the head – since clearly his image of them is identified with their most reactionary and strident New York Jewish supporters. It is surely absurd to ignore the dangers to Israel of Arafat’s state, even if they have brought it about and it is inevitable (about which I am not sure); quite ridiculous to ignore the mood of the vast majority of Israelis – anxiety, fear of war, desire to compromise if this is at all feasible, i.e. if the Israeli maximum can be made to coincide with the Arab minimum – that is what I found on my recent visit virtually everywhere outside extreme Likud circles. Equally absurd to say that Suez was designed to prevent Egypt from acquiring the Canal resources for its own development – the business about the British lifeline and the image of Nasser as a strutting dictator at the old
game of defying the democracies and getting away with lawless behaviour was certainly what the Conservatives and most of the British working class felt – Eden, after all, was passionately pro-Arab at this stage; the French were concerned only with Algiers; the Israelis were genuinely driven to distraction by the bombs thrown against children within their then awkward frontiers. What is all this about enfeebling Egypt? This does seem to me crude Marxist claptrap, worthy of Chomsky but not of Izzy. However, I have tried to put it all very mildly to dear Izzy in my letter (not An Open Letter to I. F. Stone from Sir Isaiah Berlin, President of the British Academy – nightmare thought); if you think I can send it to him I will do so, but I would rather he did not know I had asked you to ‘vet’ it. A short scribble from you in reply will be enough.

The conferences in Israel were very boring – but we enjoyed the company of the Spenders, the Hampshires, the Annans and Chuck Taylor – the last was particularly charming and exhilarating, and understood the ‘tough doves’ in Israel particularly well. I was delighted by the fact that Lady A. and the Hon. Misses A. (two) brought their baptismal certificates with them, for I don’t know what mysterious contingency: Noel, to do him justice, did not. The Spenders behaved angelically: Gaby found Sharm-el-Sheikh not beautiful enough.

Yours ever,

Isaiah

Sources

Joseph Brodsky: Beinecke Library, Yale, GEN MSS 613, Box 2, Folder 56
David Carver: University of Tulsa, McFarlin Library Special Collections
Graham Greene: Georgetown University, Graham Greene Papers 2, Box 1, Folder 2
Jean Halpérin: Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem
George Kennan: George F. Kennan Papers, MC076, Public Policy Papers, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library (Box 5, Folder 5, and online)
Bryan Magee: his papers (currently in the possession of Henry Hardy)
Robert Silvers: New York Public Library, MssCol 23385, Series I: Robert B. Silvers Files 1955–2016, by courtesy of the Manuscripts and Archives Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Those marked § first appeared in ‘The Israel Letters’, Jewish Quarterly no. 244, May 2021, 67–87. We are indebted to David Herman, who edited that selection, for allowing us to plagiarise his notes, and for other assistance. We are greatly indebted to Tal Nadan of the NYPL for her help. Thanks too to Richard Davenport-Hines for ready interpretative aid.

Vera Stern: Library of Congress, Isaac Stern Papers, Box 14
Wardens of All Souls College, Oxford (John Sparrow, Patrick Neill) and John Habakkuk: IB’s file at All Souls
Edward Weeks: University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Edward Weeks Papers, Container 3.1

Other letters were supplied by their recipients