

E.J. PRATT

Letters



E.J. Pratt, 1930
(Bursar's Office fonds, Special Collections,
E.J. Pratt Library, Victoria University, Toronto)

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Letters



Edited by Elizabeth Popham and David G. Pitt

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THE COLLECTED WORKS OF E.J. PRATT

GENERAL EDITORS: SANDRA DJWA, W.J. KEITH, ZAILIG POLLOCK.

The aim of this edition is to present a critical annotated text of the collected works of E.J. Pratt – complete poetry; selected prose and correspondence.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

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E.J. Pratt: Letters, ed. Elizabeth Popham and David G. Pitt (2017)

In addition, with the cooperation of the E.J. Pratt Library at Victoria College (Toronto) and the University of Toronto Press, the E.J. Pratt Publication Project has supplemented print publication with digital resources on *The Hypertext Pratt* website (www.trentu.ca/pratt).

Introduction

As for my own letters and correspondence generally, I haven't preserved a syllable – not a letter. I have never had a 'proprietary' interest in my own compositions apart from my manuscripts of poetry.

E.J. Pratt to H. Pearson Gundy, Librarian, Queen's University, 24 October 1961

I think he had more control over his persona than most people have. We all decide on what we would like, the face we would like to show the world, but we don't have as much control over it as he had.

Claire Pratt to Lila Laakso, Librarian, Victoria College, 1964

E.J. Pratt occupies a unique place in the history of Canadian literature. From 1925 to 1964, he was arguably Canada's foremost poet, and he had an unprecedented run as one of our first literary celebrities – a very public cultural figure at a time when the cultural identity of the nation was taking shape. The letters in this volume will confirm many aspects of the public face of E.J. Pratt, but there are also some glimpses behind the curtain. The correspondence shows him negotiating the chasms between academic and popular audiences, and Victorian and modern sensibilities. He rejected the late romanticism of the 'Confederation' poets early in his career, aspired for a time to the modernism of the McGill Group, but ultimately went his own way. Although he published several volumes of lyrics with convincing 'modernist' credentials, his most characteristic poems were meticulously researched epics which anticipated both the fascination of later Canadian poets with the 'long poem' and the 'documentary' impulse in Canadian writing and film. Repeatedly in his letters, Pratt made it clear that his poetry was intended to be populist as well as intellectual, both in its sound – which blends the cadence of Pratt's native Newfoundland

with the metric discipline of Shakespearean blank verse – and in its subject matter – which was often ripped from the headlines or the history books. He engaged with the moral and spiritual concerns of his theological education as a Methodist seminarian, the complexity of human perception and motivation being illuminated by the emerging discipline of psychology, and the potential – for violence and destruction, and for evolutionary growth – of science and technology. The resulting poems were ironic without being cynical, epic in their expansiveness, and elegiac in their focus on suffering and endurance in the face of apparently insurmountable obstacles. In short, they affirmed – and helped to create – the Canadian myth of creative moral engagement with a hostile environment.

As often happens with personal documents, particularly when the author lives in the midst of an active community, Pratt's correspondence mentions matters which we would consider of vital significance only in passing: his membership in PEN Canada; his affiliation with associations advocating for free speech and civil liberties; his participation in the Canadian-Soviet Friendship Council from its inception in 1943 to the outbreak of the 'Cold War'; and the events of both world wars, about which he writes so powerfully in his verse. For the most part, the letters in this volume are the day-to-day record of a carefully managed literary career. He started late, but once he began to write, Pratt produced a volume of verse every one to five years over three decades. Not surprisingly, much of his correspondence reflects his aims and ambitions as a poet. Perhaps because he earned immediate critical and public approval, letters written during his period of apprenticeship between 1918 and publication of *Newfoundland Verse* in 1923 contain no expressions of doubt in his abilities, but provide evidence that a small group of Pelham Edgar's protégés – Pratt, Arthur Phelps, and Herbert Greaves – regularly critiqued each other's verse. His subsequent letters to publishers, editors, and critics provide a record of his efficient negotiation of the publication and reception of his work. Throughout his career, he monitored reviews, writing letters of acknowledgment to reviewers and editors, even for mixed reviews; and he maintained a carefully planned publication schedule.¹ Correspondence related to his activities as a member of the Canadian Authors Association and editor of the CAA-sponsored *Canadian Poetry Magazine* (1936–43) shows him consciously taking on the task of 'making' Canadian culture as part of a collaborative enterprise, as well as personally as a poet and a mentor for other writers. In his letters to fellow writers and critics who supported his work, and were therefore invariably adopted as 'friends,'² we see him constructing a supportive community. As an established writer, his responses to scholars about his inspirations, philosophy, and technique provide a retrospective assessment of his own writing. The

portrait that emerges is of a man who viewed writing poetry as his ‘profession.’ However, it is the letters to Viola and Claire Pratt that most clearly provide what Gérard Genette calls ‘a more or less organized tour of the “workshop”’ of an active and successful writer, ‘uncovering the ways and means by which the text has become what it is.’³ Although he claimed that he had not ‘preserved a syllable’ of his correspondence when asked by H. Pearson Gundy to consider placing his letters in the archival collection at Queen’s University (letter to Gundy, 24 October 1961; p. 657), Pratt’s wife and daughter saw themselves as caretakers of his memory, and preserved practically everything. Taken as a whole, the letters in this volume complicate Pratt’s performed identity as professional poet by showing us the man, the husband and father, the cultural worker, and the disciplined writer collecting data and anxiously experimenting with poetic form.

Those readers familiar with David Pitt’s biography of the poet will find confirmation in the letters on which the biography was based (and others discovered after its publication) of his portrait of ‘Ned Pratt’ as a profoundly social man – the inveterate host of ‘stag’ parties at one or the other of Toronto’s clubs, gathering around him the best and brightest of the bright young men, as well as influential older ones from the worlds of culture, business, and politics. This was Pratt’s public face. For decades, Pratt was at the centre of a group of extraordinary gentlemen who were (or would become) the movers and shakers of Canadian culture. His wide-ranging acquaintance included Frederick Varley of the Group of Seven, former prime minister Arthur Meighen, future prime minister Mike Pearson, mogul Sir Ellsworth Flavelle, medical scientist Sir Fredrick Banting, career soldier and founder of the Dominion Drama Festival Colonel Henry Osborne, and Leonard Brockington, first president of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. When he was a fledgling writer, his mentors were Pelham Edgar of Victoria College, who encouraged his move from clinical psychology to literature, and Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press, who published his first collection, *Newfoundland Verse* (1923), while others like Duncan Campbell Scott – to whom he wrote a fan letter on 18 January 1918 (pp. 9–10) – and Charles G.D. Roberts, the dean of Canadian poetry in the 1920s and ’30s, offered encouragement by example. His contemporaries were fellow Victoria College student and apprentice poet Arthur Phelps, who went on to a distinguished career as an academic and radio personality; print journalist and cultural commentator William Arthur Deacon; and his great ‘enemy,’ rival poet Wilson MacDonald.⁴

As he came into his own as a writer, his literary circle expanded to include his publisher, Hugh Eayrs of Macmillan; critic W.E. Collin, author of *The White Savannahs* (1936); and the poets of the McGill Group – Frank Scott, Leo Kennedy,

A.M. Klein, and A.J.M. Smith – who enlisted the older, more established poet in the enterprise of producing the first anthology of Canadian modernist poetry, *New Provinces* (1936). As founding editor of *Canadian Poetry Magazine* (1935–43), he entered into extended correspondence with George Herbert Clarke, long-time editor of *Queen's Quarterly*, and Leo Cox of the Montreal Branch of the Canadian Authors Association, as well as communicating with hundreds of other Canadian poets – whether in detailed commentaries on poems accepted for publication or brief notes of rejection. His students included Northrop Frye, Douglas Bush, Earle Birney, Claude Bissell, Ernest Sirluck, and Desmond Pacey; and his protégés included younger colleagues like Marshall McLuhan at St Michael's College and Gordon Roper at Trinity, as well as anthologists Ralph Gustafson (*Anthology of Canadian Poetry* [1942]) and A.J.M. Smith (*The Book of Canadian Poetry* [1943]). He cultivated the approval of reviewers – particularly those like John Collings Squire of *London Mercury* and William Rose Benét of the *Saturday Review of Literature* – who could provide access to the potentially lucrative English and American markets. And, whether or not he agreed with their conclusions, he was immensely appreciative of the scholarly attention of Lorne Pierce (*An Outline of Canadian Literature* [1927]); W.E. Collin (*The White Savannahs* [1936]); E.K. Brown (*On Canadian Poetry* [1943]); Henry W. Wells and Carl Klinck (*Edwin J. Pratt: The Man and His Poetry* [1947]); John Sutherland ('E.J. Pratt: A Major Contemporary Poet,' *Northern Review* [1952] and *The Poetry of E.J. Pratt: A New Interpretation* [1956]); and Desmond Pacey (*Ten Canadian Poets: A Group of Biographical and Critical Essays* [1958]).

The highest endorsement his literary or academic acquaintances could receive in his letters was the promise to 'gather the boys together' for a dinner when the object of his approbation was next in Toronto. On 23 January 1934, in the midst of the negotiations about the selection of poems for the modernist anthology *New Provinces*, he wrote Frank Scott, suggesting that they try to schedule a 'stag' during his upcoming visit to Toronto, or at the very least 'celebration dinner when [Leo Kennedy] and Klein & Smith can be present' (p. 120). On 8 April 1941, he conspired with A.J.M. Smith to gather together E.K. Brown, and W.E. Collin from London, for a dinner when he visited Toronto in August (p. 203), and on 29 January 1954, he wrote to his daughter Claire, then working in Boston,

I am having my birthday stag a week from tomorrow (Saturday). It will be much the same gang at the York Club – Knox, McLuhan, Goudge, Corbett et al. After dinner we do nothing but chin, chin, chin till we have exhausted all the stories. I enjoy such an evening and the boys say such stags are the highlights of existence. (pp. 553–4)

Pratt's letters to Pelham Edgar in October 1945 outlining arrangements for Edgar's return to Victoria University to give an address at Alumni Hall (letters of 10 and 23 October; *EJP: Web*) show the care with which these evenings were constructed: coordinating the guest list, planning the menu in consultation with the chef at the York Club, appointing the 'chairman' and planning of the speeches, and (implicitly) orchestrating the conversation. He was pleased (and clearly relieved) when, having been appointed chairman of the Board of the Toronto Branch of the Ontario Division of the Canadian Mental Health Association after his retirement in 1953, he found that his chief duty would be to gather together potential donors at dinner meetings (letters to Claire Pratt, 4 and 15 September 1953; pp. 537–9). Finally, as Viola explained to his long-time friend Murdo MacKinnon, when quite literally on his deathbed, he declared that he was 'waiting till he was better to see his friends. He never wanted to see anyone when he was sick – but only a few days before he died he said, As soon as I get up I am going to give a bang-up dinner at the York Club' (20 March 1964; p. 668). Almost on a par were the private parties at his own home such as the dinner in 1945 for visiting poet John Frederick Nims (letter to Claire Pratt, April 1945; pp. 327–8) and receptions during the Second World War for members of the Russian embassy (letter to Carl Klinck, 7 January 1946; *EJP: Web*).

He was not only an extraordinary host but the most appreciative of guests. It was the ceremony of these formal dinners that Pratt loved, and he took great pleasure in carving at table and presiding over discussion by a lively and creative group of acquaintances. However, it becomes evident in his letters that his enjoyment came not so much from hedonism as from a feeling of responsibility for others – with the dinners providing an opportunity for mentoring and networking. Indeed, as poet Ronald Everson recalled, although he was concerned with his own finances and ability to support his adult daughter should she need assistance, 'Ned ran an unofficial Canada Council, using his own money and bits from some others of us, to help deserving unknown poets and shaky little magazines.'⁵ This was the 'Ned' Pratt for whom the café at Victoria College is named – the hospitable man who firmly believed that intellectual community needed to be fostered by gathering around a table, sharing food and drink. And, although Pratt's mentorship of young men – writers and critics – is well known, his support of the careers of young female writers can be set in the balance against his participation in the 'old boys' network' of the Toronto cultural scene of clubs and dinners. There are letters to, or in support of, Dorothy Livesay, Anne Wilkinson, P.K. Page, Doris Ferne, Eugenie Perry, and, although always with a paternalistic concern for her health, Margaret Avison. He even provided encouragement to Audrey Alexandra Brown, a favourite of

his mentor, Pelham Edgar, although he did so with a touch of resentment for her affected speech and superior attitude.

A similar spirit of community infused his poetry. Today, it is common for writers to give readings of their work – particularly in conjunction with the marketing of books. However, this is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is evident from the correspondence that, from the start of his career, both performance and publication were essential parts of Pratt's artistic process, and he was increasingly open to experimentation with media. This most 'social' of poets honed his writing in recital, and in his letters we see his need to *voice* his poetry – to *hear* it in the public space – in order to assess it, as well as his anxious need for the approval of an audience. On 6 August 1929, Pratt wrote to his mentor Pelham Edgar that *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe* was progressing, and 'I am awfully anxious to go over it with you. I would much prefer to read it to you personally as a whole than send a fragment by mail' (p. 86). Meanwhile, he was working to 'get the poem in shape' for its public debut on 17 October – prior to publication by Macmillan in February – at 'my Recital at Hart House Theatre' (p. 86). The letters are full of references to 'recitals,' sometimes with extraordinarily large audiences. For example, Pratt wrote to Edgar on 26 August 1932 that at his recent recital in Halifax, there were 'nearly a thousand people' and he 'had a gorgeous time' (p. 100). While the number was reduced to 'seven hundred' in a subsequent report to William Arthur Deacon (4 September 1932; p. 102), it is difficult to imagine this large an audience for a poetry reading today. In letters arranging speaking engagements, Pratt typically offered a range of topics from which his hosts might choose, often with 'A Poetry Recital' or 'Readings of Miscellaneous Poems' as the final offering,⁶ and it is evident as the years go by that this option was by far the most popular. *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*, 'The Great Feud,' 'The Cachalot,' and *The Titanic* are all clearly performance scripts, and while 'They Are Returning' was commissioned by Arthur Irwin for publication in *Maclean's*, it was subsequently adapted for radio before finally being published as a 'pamphlet.'

Pratt claimed in a letter to Desmond Pacey on 20 October 1954 that the evolution of this poem taught him how to write for the burgeoning medium of radio (p. 583), but *Brébeuf and His Brethren* most clearly demonstrated to Pratt the potential of moving into different media and working in partnership with other artists, when composer Healey Willan suggested the possibility of their collaboration on 'a Canadian Passion Play or Oratorio' (letter to Ellen Elliott, 28 October 1940; p. 198).⁷ (Pratt and Willan presented plans for regular performances at the Martyrs' Shrine in Midland when trying to raise financial support for a full-scale oratorio, but this grand scheme was never realized.) By the mid-1940s, the correspondence confirms that multiple stages of publication,

in a variety of media, were part of his planning for *Behind the Log*, a poem which is very much a ‘master work’ both in terms of its execution and the conditions contributing to its composition. Pratt was at the peak of his skills and reputation at this point in his career. He had recently published *Still Life and Other Poems* (1943), and *Complete Poems* volumes had been published in Canada by his long-time publisher Macmillan (1944) and in the United States by Alfred A. Knopf (1945). His potential as a ‘public poet,’ capable of shaping the national consciousness, was acknowledged in the most satisfying ways when he was commissioned by the Royal Canadian Navy to write a poem about the North Atlantic convoys – in the same spirit in which the government had engaged artists to provide a visual record of the war.⁸ Once the narrative had taken shape, Pratt performed the poem in recital, revised it in collaboration with Earle Birney for publication in *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, revamped it for a CBC radio production, and finally collaborated with Navy war artist Grant Macdonald⁹ to produce the book published by Macmillan in 1947.

Writing to Earle Birney on 14 April 1946, Pratt shared his insights on the advantages of working in different media: ‘I think you should take every opportunity of enlarging your public platforms and radio and magazines’ (p. 375). And, once published, his poems were available for collaboration after the fact in the form of performance by others, including Birney and Alan Crawley, who frequently read Pratt’s poems on CBC, and actress and elocutionist Cécile de Banke (alone or with her students) in concert and on radio.¹⁰ Pratt proudly informed E.K. Brown on 4 November 1941 that his patriotic poem ‘Dunkirk’ had been read on air on Armistice Day by Lionel Brockington, then special assistant to Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King (p. 215), and boasted to Lorne Pierce on 13 April 1949 that the final verse of his ‘Newfoundland Seamen’ was read by both Prime Minister Louis St Laurent and Lionel Brockington (then president of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) in their broadcasts welcoming Newfoundland into Confederation in 1949 (pp. 430–1). Full-scale dramatic performances of Pratt’s long poems were a staple on the CBC, in part because of the educational market,¹¹ but also because – especially during the Second World War – they fulfilled the patriotic mandate of the national network.

From the first, Pratt clearly considered recitals to be an integral part of his role as a poet, as well as a supplementary source of income. On 4 May 1925, he wrote to Bill Deacon that he had ‘[j]ust come back from London where I gave an address and reading on Newfoundland’ (p. 58). In the 1940s, end-of-term recitals of his poetry were a regular feature of his routine as a teacher in the summer schools at Halifax and Kingston. On 29 July 1940, he wrote to Viola about his first public reading from the manuscript of *Brébeuf* at Grant Hall, with an audience that ‘ran to 350’: ‘I got through the half hour all right. Really not

long enough to do justice to the subject but quite long enough for the heat and the attention of the audience. It gave me some idea of what passages to read and what to explain in prose' (p. 190). On 28 July 1945, he wrote from Halifax, where he had been teaching a class at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, 'I am getting ready now for my recital tonight to the sweet penguin-dressed sisters' (p. 359), and on 1 August, he sent his daughter Claire a cheque for \$25: 'I received my pay for the Summer School recital last Thursday night' (p. 360). In addition to visits to regional CAA groups in Ontario and Quebec, he was enlisted to give series of talks and recitals across Canada in 1927–8 by the Association of Canadian Clubs (letters to Lorne Pierce, 15 July and 10 August 1927; pp. 72 and 74), and during the Second World War visited American venues in a tour sponsored by the Wartime Information Board (WIB) (letters to E.K. Brown, 11 May and 14 September, 1943; pp. 254 and 262).¹² At the high point of his career, after the publication of his *Collected Poems* in Canada and the United States, he was in constant demand as a speaker. On 3 February 1946, he wrote to William Rose Benét that he had been invited 'to give the Morris Gray lecture-recital at Harvard this year' (p. 371), and on 14 April, writing to congratulate Earle Birney on his Governor General's Award, he reported that he had just returned "from Texas, of all places" where he had given "a poetry-recital" – the last in 'a series of five trips during the last two months, Rochester, Buffalo, Harvard, Columbia and Houston. If this sort of thing had come ten years ago, how welcome it would have been' (p. 375).

Recognizing public interest in his exotic heritage, Pratt worked up lectures on Newfoundland language and culture. On 31 July 1947, he wrote to Albert Hatcher, president of Memorial College in St John's, that he would be unable to accept his invitation to return to Newfoundland that year, but that his brother Cal had been organizing a series of 'addresses and recitals' for the fall of 1948. He asked whether the college would be willing to sponsor the trip, saying 'During the time in St. John's I could give three lectures (excluding the two special ones) on subjects related to my own work, say, provisionally, "Poetry of the Sea," "The technique of the dramatic narrative," "the *Titanic* as a study in irony," or kindred subjects that would let me work in some readings and some references to Newfoundland life' (p. 402). In the end, he did not make the trip home until January 1949, when he was asked by the St Andrew's Society to preside at the annual Robbie Burns dinner and took the opportunity to combine his speaking engagements with research for a book on Sir John Franklin's final expedition in 1845–7.¹³

In the 1950s, especially after his official retirement in 1953, Pratt suffered from a number of minor but debilitating ailments and was no longer writing,¹⁴ but he

remained an active performer of his work. Performances were stripped down, and he asked for reassurance that he would not be required to stand for any length of time or cope with a question period. On 22 March 1952, he wrote to Father V.J. Guinan, president of the University of St Thomas in Houston to modify his earlier acceptance of an invitation to speak:

There is just one qualification which I discussed with Father McCorkell. I like giving lectures, but Floor discussion is a bit uncongenial, partly because an ear infection this winter has made me slightly deaf, and partly because controversy from the Floor has always been a nervous exaction for me. I don't mind small groups where there is a sit-around intimacy and informality and everyone is at ease. (p. 489)

Despite these handicaps, he thrived on performance, volunteering to supplement his main talk with 'as many "talks" and lecture-recitals as desired, inside or outside your city, the same as on the previous trip' (p. 489).

However, in interviews with his wife and daughter following his death, and in Claire Pratt's portrait of her father in the final chapter of her family history *The Silent Ancestors*,¹⁵ another side of Pratt emerges. While publicly he was the antithesis of the 'poet in the garret,' this too was part of his artistic process – both literally and figuratively. Several of his long poems were researched and composed – at least in part – in Mrs Cartwright's rooming house (125 University Avenue in Kingston) during summer session at Queen's University, or in residence rooms at Dalhousie, and his daughter recalled that, when she was a child, '[e]venings and weekends, when he was not playing golf, saw him in his den in a huge chair beside the fire, filling black notebooks with a tiny stub of pencil ... In the summer, the setting would change to our cottage at Bobcaygeon in what was then deep country stillness where he would settle comfortably, feet up, on a chair on the screened-in verandah, or the green den he had built for himself fifty yards from the cottage and nearer the lake where there was nothing to disturb him but the occasional crow' (p. 171). At the opening of the E.J. Pratt Room of Contemporary Poetry in the Victoria College Library in 1964, Claire Pratt commented that 'his absent-mindedness ... his being hail fellow well met, and stag parties ... was only a garment that he put on.' At home, sheltered from his busy public life, '[s]ilence was absolutely necessary to him. There was no way he could function without it. There was no way we could not provide it for him. And we did. The house was always quiet. Although we had people, we had people in and out of the house all the time – guests coming to stay – but no noisy ones, at least if they were, they quickly lost their noisiness when they got there! ... People just knew what he wanted and they fitted in with him' (VLP,

VUL, box 39, file 16). His letters are full of complaints about noise – crows in a letter to Claire on Christmas 1949 (p. 447); cars near the new house on Glencairn Avenue on 27 June 1953 (p. 532); radiators, anonymous ‘snoring,’ and inconsiderate boarders in ‘the [G.B.] Harrison house’ during a teaching exchange in Kingston on 12 March 1945 (p. 322). In a letter to Claire on 26 September 1956, he declared that an extended visit by a very talkative family friend ‘had me on the floor just slumped with inertia’ (p. 628).

His family was called upon to support both the public persona of the poet and the private discipline required to produce his poems, and one of the most intriguing aspects of the Pratt correspondence is the evidence of his partnership in both respects with his extraordinary wife, Viola Leone Whitney Pratt. Viola was a career woman at the centre of a cultural circle of her own, focused on her work as founding editor of the international children’s magazine *World Friends* (1929–55) and the numerous women’s clubs that defined the intellectual and social life of educated women in Toronto: the University Women’s Club, the Heliconian Club, the Canadian Club, and the ‘Talents,’ a service club founded by Viola and Claire Pratt to provide help to those ineligible for assistance from social agencies. (The degree of gender segregation in the cultural community of the time may surprise some readers.) It was Viola who had first introduced Pratt to the informal poetry class held by Pelham Edgar on Monday evenings at Victoria College, and she recognized and supported the public obligations and private discipline integral to her husband’s double role as university professor and poet. As a young wife and mother, she accepted the necessity for a writer-scholar to take his grand tour of Britain;¹⁶ as the partner of a successful writer at the height of his career, she acted as hostess, research assistant, and sounding board for work in progress; as the mature wife of an infirm retired man, she assisted with the freelance editing assignments that augmented their income, even while she maintained her own career; in his final years, she was both his nurse and his conduit to the outside world.

Most significantly, Viola and later Claire, herself a talented artist and poet, were E.J. Pratt’s chief correspondents. The main reason we have such a comprehensive record of Pratt’s ‘workshop’ is that he was so often separated from his family. The carefree days when, as a bachelor or young married man, Pratt could retreat to Bobcaygeon in the summer months to write disappeared by 1937 when he pre-emptively (and without consulting his wife) sold the summer property. Claire had contracted poliomyelitis in the autumn of 1925 and required surgeries throughout her life to treat associated illnesses and infections.¹⁷ Both E.J. and Viola Pratt took on extra work in order to carry the financial burden associated with Claire’s medical condition and had been less and less able to make use of the cottage.¹⁸ Starting in 1931, Pratt taught in Summer Sessions at Dalhousie, the University of British Columbia, and Queen’s, while

Viola's position as editor of *World Friends* and other contract work often kept her in Toronto. There were medical bills to be paid, and Pratt was anxious to set up an annuity in case his daughter should be unable to support herself financially as an adult. His concern for his daughter's health and financial security is palpable in his letters to his wife, and later to Claire herself when she moved to New York to study at Columbia University in 1944 and to Boston in 1953. As he approached retirement, and then embarked on his post-retirement career as a fundraiser and freelance editor, he frequently voiced concerns about both his inadequate pension and her financial needs. However, Viola Pratt bore the brunt of hands-on care for Claire when her husband was away at summer school and when Claire was undergoing major surgeries and convalescences in New York and Cambridge.

Separated from his wife and daughter for months at a time, Pratt wrote long, chatty letters, full of accounts of his meetings and conversations, his research for the latest of his poems, and their early reception in recital. We meet the private man, who was, among other things, an inveterate sports enthusiast. As a golfer, he was thrilled to be able to attend the British Open in 1924 and the Vancouver Jubilee Open, played on the Shaughnessy Heights Golf Course in 1936 (letters to Viola Pratt, 22 June 1924 and 24 July 1936; pp. 41 and 148). He was proud of his success in the annual Catarqui Golf Club tournaments in the 1930s and 40s (letter to Viola Pratt, 28 July 1939; p. 175), and as late as 1950 wrote that, although he could not play in 'the great Tournament at the Catarqui Course ... it will be a pleasure to sit under a tree and watch the 496 scratch players approaching the 18th green' (letter to Viola Pratt, 12 August 1950; *EJP: Web*). In retirement, when walking was difficult, his old friend and golfing buddy Malcolm Wallace convinced him to take up lawn bowling (letter to Claire Pratt, 8 October 1954; p. 581). But he was also an avid boxing fan and (surprisingly) once blithely declared that the ice capades 'is my favourite out-door pastime' (letter to Viola Pratt, 22 Jan. 1955; p. 612).

When he taught summer school, he was freed from the heavy workload of the regular academic session (during which he also regularly took on overload teaching for the School of Dentistry or Department of Extension) and from the social obligations that accompanied his professional life, and was able to devote more of his energy to writing. In some respects the solitude suited him. For example, on 5 July 1939, he wrote to Viola from Queen's University, describing his complete immersion in research for *Brébeuf and His Brethren*: 'I just stayed in my room with coat and shirt off all the afternoon and with the thirty-third volume of the Jesuit Relations in my hands trying to get some shape to the new idea. It is going to be a tremendous task, perhaps too big, but I imagine the hardest is getting started. Should it take shape and go, it ought to hit a clip, but it's a gamble' (*EJP: Web*). And on 20 July, he confessed to Claire that he was relieved to find

out that he could not possibly finish the poem in time for the three hundredth anniversary of the massacre, because now he could take his time ‘ploughing ... through the thousands of pages and find out just what material is suitable’ (p. 175). In the summer of 1945, Pratt’s research for the poem that would become *Behind the Log* is of a different sort, and his letters convey his excitement at the degree of the Navy’s cooperation with the project: tours of navy vessels, interviews with officers, ratings, and common seamen, access to still restricted information about sonar and other naval technologies, and VIP treatment at every turn. On 26 June, he wrote to his wife: ‘It is certainly going to be a difficult job learning the ways of the ship and her instruments – bigger even than I anticipated and I’ll take the necessary time’ (p. 343). That summer and the following autumn as the poem took shape, Pratt wrote enthusiastically to Pelham Edgar, Douglas Bush, E.K. Brown, and Earle Birney, often exaggerating both the duration of his tours of naval vessels and the level of access he had been given for the sake of a good story. For example, he wrote to Bush on 1 July 1945 that ‘[t]he Admiralty Board at Ottawa offered me access to the ships of the Navy for the Summer for the purpose of getting a poem “done” on the operations in the North Atlantic. The Board wants records in verse as well as in documentary prose’ (p. 346), but went on to say that ‘I have spent the last two weeks out to sea in the *Micmac*, a tribal destroyer’ (pp. 346–7) when he had been in Halifax for one week and spent only one day on the ship.¹⁹ The almost daily letters to ‘Vi’ in July provide a more accurate, if more pedestrian, record of his investigations.

In the case of *Towards the Last Spike*, his last great documentary poem, that record is enlivened by his bantering correspondence with his daughter Claire, whom he always felt an obligation to entertain. Pratt had conducted preliminary research for his ‘railway saga’ (letter to E.K. Brown, 17 November 1950; p. 462) while teaching at the summer school in Kingston and in September embarked on a CPR-sponsored trip to Alberta and British Columbia with Viola, who acted as his ‘amanuensis’ and research assistant.²⁰ On 9 September 1950, he sent his daughter a detailed list of some of the questions he had prepared for an interview with George Dalmage, a government geologist: ‘(1) Would fossils be discovered in the midst of the mountain tunnels several thousand feet below the summit?’ ‘(2) Are they found along the river beds?’ ‘(3) What makes the Kicking Horse River so chalky white, a dirty chalky?’ (p. 453), and so on. The next day, he wrote to Viola, who had gone to visit her brother in Red Deer while her husband conducted research in Vancouver, announcing jubilantly that the information provided by Dalmage would support the central metaphor of his poem:

I have also learned what muskeg is exactly – a lake of water over which vegetation has grown particularly caribou moss (the food of caribou) and – what I had hoped

for – it covers the pre-Cambrian rock – so it can be made part of the ‘lizard,’ perhaps a leg or a flipper such as an alligator might have. This lizard I expect will be fearfully and wonderfully made, perhaps grotesquely made, before the beast is finally carved out. (p. 455)

And later the same day, he wrote to Claire with a detailed report on his findings about fossils, concluding with a humorous attempt to bond with his artistic daughter:

The trilobite is like a crab. I shall give evidence of my draughtsmanship by drawing one from a verbal description given me by Mr Dalmage ...

Almost human isn't it? I have known people whose faces resembled that. I could mention a few but my artistic modesty forbids elaborating on the resemblance for if you knew whom I had in mind you would say that I was seeking a compliment on my achievement. Suffice it to say that I have looked like that occasionally when a poem went bad or when I was turning over in bed vainly trying to get to sleep on the CPR. (p. 456)

Here, as always, Pratt's writing process for his long poems involved intensive research, followed by journalistic investigation. On 2 August 1945, he responded to a series of questions from Pelham Edgar, who was writing an article for an issue of the Quebec journal *Les Gants du Ciel* devoted to English Canadian writing, lamenting that, in the case of the ‘new’ poem, *Behind the Log*, ‘I haven't written a line yet, have nothing but data, data, data. The task of selection and elimination is tremendous. I may get at it in early fall’ (p. 363). In the same letter, he reminded Edgar of the process of composition of the first of his documentary poems, *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*, recalling how Edgar solicited funds from wealthy patrons so that he might ‘spend a week on the steamer and get all the details from the officers and crew,’ investigate ‘the funeral service held in the saloon of the R on the night of the storm when the two sailors Heitman and Wertanen were drowned,’ and ascertain ‘the exact messages transmitted from the Antinoe to R and from R to A. A wireless officer described the sounds of the dots & dashes and I made up my own metaphors, etc.’ (p. 362). In the case of *Brébeuf*, in addition to documentary research, he interviewed priests on ‘the matter of ritual,’ walked the site, and surveyed local fauna (p. 362).

Pratt's lyric poetry involved a different process. Lyric was the mode of his apprenticeship, and in a letter to John Sutherland on 21 May 1954, he described *Rachel* – his first publication – as having been ‘written in a flat Wordsworthian (Michael) style,’ acknowledging that he did not find his ‘characteristic vein’ until *Witches Brew*, published nine years later (p. 566). On

25 November 1954, in answer to Desmond Pacey's query about 'influences' on his writing,²¹ Pratt wrote, 'I admired (and still admire) the Carman, Lampman, Roberts, D.C. Scott group. But, as far as I know, there was no influence, for I reacted in the early '20s against the landscape prepossessions, regarding 'scenery' mainly as backdrop to human endeavour' (p. 600). He went on to declare, 'As Canadian poetry had its fill of pastoral and amorous treatment, I got a bit fed up with it. As you say, I didn't feel drawn to it. I abhor sticky sonnets particularly' (p. 601). In fact, Pratt's early lyrics share defining features with the modernism of F.R. Scott and A.J.M. Smith in this prejudice against romanticism, as well as in their impersonal voice, stripped down imagery, vernacular diction, and experimentations with poetic form. Yet many of his comments on modernism and its practitioners are distinctly ambivalent – occasionally even hostile. On 8 July 1933, teaching summer school in Halifax, he wrote to his wife, '[t]he nuns are as cordial as ever – I had them laughing over modernistic poetry yesterday' (p. 109). And on 1 August 1945, teaching summer session at Queen's University, he took great delight in telling his daughter an anecdote about 'a couple of chaps at Harvard who decided to put over a fast one on the critical cults in poetic criticism' by submitting nonsense verse to 'an exclusive magazine which printed it with the comment that the poem opened up a new epoch in American poetry,' and then publishing it 'in the form of a small book with brilliant format and fine printing' to critical acclaim (p. 360).

However, although he repeatedly asked, 'To what depths has the school of obscurity sunk?' (p. 360), he was also anxious for acceptance – for inclusion in the category of 'younger' poets. On 5 August 1941, having finally – after years of trying – had his verse accepted for publication in *Poetry* (Chicago), he wrote what amounts to a fan letter to editor George Dillon to say 'how much I love your Magazine':

With the exception of a few lean years of oatmeal fare, I have been a subscriber since 1916, and have been an unofficial publicity agent for *Poetry* in Canada. I used to get the odd letter from 'Harriet' and the not-so-odd rejection slip with its little P.S. – 'I liked your "Erosion" or your "Magnolia Blossoms," but we are dreadfully overcrowded. It *nearly* got in.' I owe Harriet an immense debt if for no other reason than she taught me how to palliate blows at unfortunate contributors, during my own editorial term of office.

Those were great days – Sandburg, Lindsay, Frost, Yeats falling into my lap every month or so. They did so much for me in my callow twenties. And I am sure that you have brought back the old glories. Jeffers, MacLeish, Fearing, Rukeyser lay hold upon my soul. I liked 'Quiz' of Ruth Lechlitner. I should like to meet Babette Deutsch. She's a honey! If you should manage to come up to Toronto, Brown and

I will put on a partridge dinner for you. He was most enthusiastic about you. Floreat 'Poetry' (p. 206)

Here and elsewhere, Pratt aligned himself with the modernist generation, claiming to be in his 'callow twenties' in 1916, when he was actually thirty-four, and claiming the poets currently being published in *Poetry* as his contemporaries. In the Canadian context, Pratt literally was of two generations. His true contemporaries were Robert Service, Marjorie Pickthall, and Kenneth Leslie, but he did not begin to write until he was thirty years old, and the publication dates of his first books – *Rachel* (1917) and *Newfoundland Verse* (1923) – placed him in the company of younger writers. In 1934, when he was asked to contribute to the anthology of 'new poetry' that would become *New Provinces*, there is little doubt that his chief qualifications for inclusion in Scott and Smith's anthology were that he (together with Robert Finch) would provide geographic balance to the Montreal group and – as one of the best-selling poets in Canada – he would guarantee a broader audience for the collection. When *New Provinces* and W.E. Collin's *The White Savannahs* were published in 1936, he was fifty-two (born in 1882), while F.R. Scott was thirty-five (b. 1899), Robert Finch thirty-four (b. 1900), A.J.M. Smith thirty-two (b. 1902), Leo Kennedy twenty-seven (b. 1907), and A.M. Klein the youngest at twenty-five (b. 1909).

His attempts to fit into this company of younger poets were somewhat endearing. In the letters to and from F.R. Scott in which the selection of poems was being negotiated, Scott acted as contact for the Montreal writers, and Pratt for himself and Finch in Toronto, each to some degree attempting to soften the sometimes blunt critiques of Smith and Finch. Pratt typically attempted to build a sense of community. For example, on 9 January 1934, he conveyed Finch's suggestion that 'we be known as the "group of six" as a publicity matter,' and proposed a dinner 'as a celebration of the birth of the volume' (p. 117), concluding, rather anxiously, 'This group is to continue in perpetuity, isn't it so?' (p. 117). However, awkwardness becomes distinct discomfort in his attempts to negotiate the matter of Smith's famously 'suppressed' preface. In his letter of 11 January 1934, Scott declared his intention to 'introduce a touch of political radicalism somewhere' in the anthology, and Smith's political agenda was evident in the rejected preface in which he argued that the modern poet 'must try to perfect a technique that will combine power with simplicity and sympathy with intelligence so that he may play his part in developing mental and emotional attitudes that will facilitate the creation of a more practical social system.'²² Pratt certainly agreed with, and 'embodied ... in his own practice,' much of what Smith had to say about the need for a 'substantial renovation of poetic technique,'²³ and in many of his letters – especially once he had taken

on the editorship of *Canadian Poetry Magazine* and was soliciting poems from members of the *New Provinces* group – he expressed similar sentiments about ‘the products of the “Maple Leaf” Milling Co.’ (9 October 1940; p. 197) and the unbearable ‘sweetness’ of the verse so heavily represented in anthologies like John W. Garvin’s *Canadian Poets* (1916, 1926).²⁴ However, while he echoed modernist rhetoric in the correspondence about Smith’s preface, he had an older – and more conservative – man’s sense of decorum in matters both poetic and political.

On 20 December 1935, he wrote to Scott:

I went over the ms. and read for proof, then took it over to Finch who did likewise. Finch feels very strongly that the Preface ought to go. He doesn’t like the tone of it and the general impression which will be left on the public mind that Canadian literature had to wait for us to get its first obstetrical success. We talked it over with Eayrs who likes the verse but is very dubious about the prologue. He calls it ‘nose-tweaking.’ (p. 137)

Hugh Eayrs had agreed to publish the anthology because of Pratt’s track record with Macmillan – although with conditions to protect the press financially. Although Finch also found the essay unacceptable, it was Eayrs’s discomfort that most swayed Pratt to his opinion that a one-page statement of ‘point of view’ by Scott (letter to Scott, 14 January 1936; p. 138) should replace Smith’s colourful tirade against ‘the great dead body of poetry laid out in the mortuary of the *Oxford Book* or interred under Garvin’s florid epitaphs.’²⁵ Here, as in his position as editor of *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, Pratt walked a middle path. On 5 December 1935, he wrote to Dorothy Livesay, accepting ‘Day and Night’ for publication in the first number, but adding a word of caution about the accessibility of modernist verse to potential readers:

Dee, I think a little punctuation in the short-lined verses might clarify poetic intention. I am aware of some of the changes going on in that direction, but I am afraid the public might put the newer styles down to oversight in proof-reading. I do not like too much punctuation myself, but I think the verses are a trifle scant in this case. (p. 135)

And, on 23 February 1936, with the fate of *New Provinces* still uncertain, he wrote to Scott:

Say, supposing I went through the carbon copy of *New Provinces*, which I have, would I be at liberty to take the odd poem at the regular ridiculous rates. I need

you fellows for stiffening, – where my own personal taste lies. But I am supposed to give a representative collection and not ignore the traditional schools, though I am keeping out the scarlet maples and the beaver dams wherever possible. (p. 141)

In the aftermath of *New Provinces*, Pratt's continuing support for Kennedy, Klein, Scott, and Smith – and for Smith's anthology project – was counterbalanced by a sense of personal resentment of the next wave of young Montreal writers – 'the Anderson Scott Page Ruddick gang' (letter to Smith, 28 January 1944; p. 276)²⁶ and the 'angry penguins'²⁷ of the contentious Montreal CAA chapter (letter to Claire Pratt, 13 October 1944; p. 274). However, the issue was less disdain for modernism than revulsion at their shockingly bad manners. On 28 January 1944, he was outraged that Neufville Shaw 'acted like a shit' in his review of A.J.M. Smith's *The Book of Canadian Poetry in Preview*:

I didn't mind the criticisms so much as the prejudice. It was so blatantly obvious that the whole article was a build up for the Preview editorial coterie. After damning all Canadian literature up to the present, there came in the last paragraph a eulogy of the Anderson Scott Page Ruddick gang. The new Light had arisen now and Poetry had just been stalling for those bastards to rise in their effulgence. I don't know Shaw but he gave his case away by that last paragraph. Only a god-damn imbecile could have been guilty of such patent self-infatuation. All of the great ones listed were Preview Editors except Watson. The only notable omission was Preview – Ruddick.

... All we want is a discriminating criticism, severe at times as it may be, – not a self-interested extermination. They ought to have been thankful that an anthology had come out which was catholic enough to admit the old and the new, the traditional and the experimental. Shaw & Ruddick were mad they weren't included. (pp. 276–7)

Despite such outbursts, Pratt ultimately maintained an uneasy neutrality in the poetry wars, aligned with the modernists but unwilling to dismiss the traditionalists entirely, and writing the long poems that ultimately defined his career. As Brian Trahearne has observed, Pratt's *The Titanic* (like his other book-length poems) is 'characteristic of the poet but not of his or her era, and the relation ... to modernism is fruitfully debatable.'²⁸

What is not debatable is Pratt's status as a shaper of Canadian consciousness – as Canada's epic poet. There is, of course, some irony here, as for much of his life Pratt was not 'Canadian.' He was born and raised in another country – Newfoundland – which did not enter Confederation until 1949. As he explained to Duncan Campbell Scott on 18 January 1918, his early verse 'springs out of the

sea-faring life of Newfoundland, my native home' (p. 10), and largely owing to the efforts of his brother Cal, who assured that every library in Newfoundland received a copy of each of his books²⁹ and eventually commissioned David Pitt to edit the anthology *Here the Tides Flow* (letter to Pitt, 2 February 1958; p. 639), Pratt became and has remained Newfoundland's undeclared poet laureate. Regarding his position as a defining Canadian voice, Pratt himself was sceptical, writing in a letter to Desmond Pacey on 25 November 1954, 'Nationalism was never very strong. The only poems which might be called 'Canadian' are *Brébeuf* and certainly the *Spike*. The subject is tremendously dramatic, and I had the additional advantage of being able to *go over the ground*' (p. 601). On 17 November 1950, he wrote to E.K. Brown about *Towards the Last Spike*:

I've come to the conclusion that the C.P.R. was built not so much by the chaps who did the technical and physical work, indispensable as they were, but by the fellows with the gift of gab, the talkers and the wranglers and argufiers. 'In the beginning was the Word' – and so to the end, to the last spike. Does that strike you as a perverse way of viewing the thing? I sometimes take a cockeyed view of things, as you are well aware. But I think I am sound on this.' (p. 462)

Elsewhere, he described *Towards the Last Spike* as 'an objective poem on the First Canadian transcontinental – objective in the sense that it is neither pro nor con politically' (letter to John Sutherland, 15 November 1951; p. 479). This was typical of Pratt's resistance to making overtly political statements, another way in which he was distinguished from the modernist poets. F.R. Scott expressed the difference very clearly when he asked in 'All Spikes but the Last', 'Where are the coolies in your poem, Ned? ... who has sung their story?' (ll. 1, 6).³⁰ However, the subjects of his poems – natural disasters, martyrdom, wartime heroism, the building of the transcontinental railway – were (and are) focal points for patriotic or nationalistic feeling, and while Pratt's treatment focused on psychological and moral testing rather than social or political issues, his work resonated with a nation struggling to define itself. His poems of Newfoundland authorize regional identity; his war poems – *Dunkirk*, *They Are Returning* (which he planned to subtitle 'A Canadian Poem') (letter to Ellen Elliott, 7 July 1945 (p. 349)), and *Behind the Log* – trace a national coming of age through global conflict; *Titanic*, *Brébeuf and His Brethren*, and *Towards the Last Spike* resonate with the geographic immensity of Canada and the imagination and will of those confronting it. 'In the beginning was the Word.'

We tend to associate the rise of cultural nationalism in Canada with the period following the Second World War: the report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences (the Massey Report)

in 1951; the founding of the National Library in 1953; the Canadian Writers Conference at Queen's University in 1955;³¹ the establishment of the Canada Council in 1957; and the first issue of *Canadian Literature* in 1959. However, the correspondence of E.J. Pratt demonstrates how the ground was laid for these developments by the activities of the Canadian Authors Association to encourage Canadian writers and publishers in the 1930s and '40s; the establishment in 1935 of *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, the first journal devoted to Canadian poetry; the founding of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1936; the institution of the Governor General's Awards for literature in 1937; and the emergence of a new nationalism in and through Canadian participation in the Second World War. Pratt's letters provide a view of the enterprise from its very centre – from the perspective of the foremost literary figure of his time.

NOTES

- 1 For example, on 15 June 1945, he wrote to Ellen Elliott at Macmillan about "They Are Returning": "One reason why I should like to have it produced is that I may not have another book for two or three years. This is the only poem I have written in two years, and the one now projected on the convoys and the R.C.N. generally, will take me two years or more from now" (p. 337).
- 2 His letter to anthologist Ralph Gustafson on 19 September 1956 is typical: "It is always grand to get a word of appreciation from a man like yourself whom I admire and love. You have ever been a great friend of mine and (apart from it) when you come to Toronto I shall put up a real "stag" for you at the York Club with your friends to "circle" you at the dinner table, if the geometry of the room allows the "circling"" (p. 627).
- 3 *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 401.
- 4 The designation was MacDonald's rather than Pratt's. In the 1930s, the two were considered by many to be Canada's best poets, which fuelled their rivalry. On 20 November 1935, Pratt had written to MacDonald to acknowledge his letter of congratulations on the publication of *Titanic* (pp. 133–4). In the bottom margin, MacDonald scrawled "This is from Pratt – my life-long enemy."
- 5 Ronald G. Everson to David G. Pitt, 1 May 1967. See the letter to John Sutherland, 29 September 1955 (p. 621).
- 6 See the letters to Margaret Furness MacLeod, 22 September 1941 (pp. 211–12) and Father V.J. Guinan, 22 March 1952 (pp. 488–90).
- 7 A musical and dramatic version of *Brébeuf* composed by Healey Willan was performed at the CBC studios on 26 September 1943, with Ettore Mazzoleni

conducting the orchestra and James Finlay producing the broadcast. The first public performance – by the Mendelssohn Choir and the Toronto Symphony directed by Sir Ernest MacMillan – was on 18 January 1944 at Massey Hall; in 1947, Willan adapted the script for performance by choir and organ. A version was performed under his direction at the Timothy Eaton Memorial Church in 1967.

- 8 In the First World War, artists (including Frederick Varley, A.Y. Jackson, and Wyndham Lewis) were commissioned by the Canadian War Memorials Fund to depict Canada's participation in the war. In the Second World War, the Canadian War Records Programme seconded artists serving in the armed forces, including Lawren Harris, Charles Comfort, and Alex Colville.
- 9 See 'Grant Macdonald: The Artist, the Protagonist and the War at Sea,' *Fresh Water – A Journal of Great Lakes Marine History* 6, no. 1 (1991).
- 10 See, for example, the letters to Cécile de Banke, 24 December 1941 and 21 November 1942 (pp. 217–18 and 241).
- 11 Pratt's poems were staples in textbooks for the Ontario schools: *Heroic Tales in Verse* (1941) and *Poems for Upper School 1956–57* (1956), which included *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*; *Poems for Senior Students* (1950), *Poems for Upper Schools* (1953), and *Poems for Upper Schools 1958–59* (1958), which included *The Titanic*. Both *Ten Selected Poems* (1947) and *Here the Tides Flow* (1962), edited by David G. Pitt for the Newfoundland market, included substantial selections of Pratt's verse.
- 12 The CAA had set up a Writers' War Committee, of which Pratt was a member, to work in conjunction with the WIB, to 'channel more effectively contributions of Canadian writers toward the War effort at home and abroad.' Brown coordinated a brief tour of American sites, including Cornell University, where he was teaching.
- 13 The principal source of information about the never-completed Franklin project is Pratt's report to the Humanities Research Council in spring 1949 (pp. 428–30). Shortly afterward, Pratt shifted his attention to the building of the transcontinental railroad, publishing *Towards the Last Spike* in 1952.
- 14 Pratt made the first of many references to problems with his right eye in a letter to John Sutherland on 12 May 1953 (p. 527), and finally admitted to 'chronic eye-strain' on 12 November 1956 (p. 632). On 18 February 1958, he wrote to Pacey, 'Neuritis set in all through my left foot necessitating a wheel chair in the house' and 'my hand is shaky with neuritis' (p. 640).
- 15 In *The Silent Ancestors: The Forebearers of E.J. Pratt* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), Claire Pratt described her father's subtle enforcement of the 'discipline' of silence on both children and adults: 'by some osmosis that many of us would give our eye-teeth to understand, the message came unmistakably through that there was to be *no noise* nor disturbing commotion ... Guests at a dinner party, if they did not know when to go home, were often minus a host by a certain hour, and no hard feelings. In fact, people took it for granted' (171–2).

- 16 On 7 August 1924, he wrote to Lorne Pierce: 'I have been to every great literary centre since I came over and have drunk deeply. I shall end that sentence right there so as to leave your imagination free scope for figurative exercise' (p. 51).
- 17 See *EJP: TY*, 72–4.
- 18 Several letters to friends confirm arrangements for their rental of the cottage. See, for example, the letter to Lorne Pierce of 30 January 1932 (pp. 95–6), and letters to William Arthur Deacon of 3 June 1926 (p. 66) and 4 September 1932 (pp. 101–2).
- 19 He later wove similar tales around his preparation to write *Brébeuf and His Brethren*, claiming in a letter to Henry Wells that 'I lived for a year practically with the Jesuits, attended Mass, spent hours and days in the Cathedrals before the altars, became almost a Catholic to get inside Brébeuf' (26 February 1945; p. 320). When the statement was echoed in the manuscript of *Edwin J. Pratt: The Man and His Poetry* (1947), Pratt corrected the exaggeration in a letter to Karl Klinck on 21 November 1945: 'I deleted "became almost a Catholic." I might be taken up on that literally. It is strong enough as it stands' (p. 320).
- 20 Pratt wrote his wife on 18 September 1950 with instructions to 'keep your eyes open for any kinds of trees, flowers, moss etc. that the CPR tracks might go over in their first laying. I don't know what use I can make of them yet but I am sure that they will be helpful some time' (p. 462). Viola kept a 'CPR journal' containing this and other information and Pratt integrated her catalogue of cotton grass, orchids, sphagnum moss, bladder-wort, sweet-gale, and pitcher plants into his depiction of the Precambrian shield (*TLS*, ll. 1269–75; *CP2*, pp. 239–40).
- 21 Pacey was writing a book of critical essays on major Canadian poets, published as *Ten Canadian Poets* in 1958.
- 22 A.J.M. Smith, 'A Rejected Preface,' *Canadian Literature* 24 (Spring 1965): 9.
- 23 Brian Trahearne, 'Afterword,' *Canadian Poetry 1920 to 1960* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2010), 435.
- 24 On 17 September 1941, Pratt wrote to Smith to congratulate him on receiving support from the Guggenheim Foundation to create an anthology of Canadian poetry: 'I think it is a great national blessing that the Foundation recognized you as the man for the job. The Garvin tradition is alive only in the drawing-rooms and the cross-road churches' (p. 210).
- 25 Smith, 'A Rejected Preface,' 7.
- 26 In a letter to Deacon on 10 July 1946, he expresses a similar opinion of the 'inflated exhibitionism' of 'the Anderson, – Layton – Souster gang,' and the hope that '[t]hey may grow out of it in time' (p. 379).
- 27 An allusion to the Australian avant-garde journal *Angry Penguins*. See the note to 'a fast one on the critical cults of poetic criticism' in the letter to Claire Pratt, 1 August 1945 (p. 360).
- 28 Trahearne, 'Afterword,' 444.

- 29 On 29 September 1955, Pratt wrote to John Sutherland that his brother was ordering one hundred copies of the *Northern Review* issue devoted to his work: 'He intends contributing two copies to each of the 28 libraries in Nfld. and taking the balance for personal gifts' (p. 620). This was typical of Cal's support.
- 30 *F.R. Scott: Selected Poems* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1966), 64
- 31 See *Writing in Canada: Proceedings of the Canadian Writers' Conference, Queen's University, 28–31 July, 1955*, ed. George Whalley (Toronto: Macmillan, 1956).

Editorial Procedures

Principles of Selection

The letters collected by David G. Pitt in the course of his biographical research form the bulk of this anthology of E.J. Pratt's correspondence; Elizabeth Popham has been responsible for the collection of additional letters, textual editing, and annotation. With the gradual acquisition of the papers of E.J. Pratt's contemporaries by archival collections, the number of letters to and from Pratt available for study continues to grow. As of the date of publication, the editors have collected just under 1,200 letters from E.J. Pratt to family, friends, and professional contacts. All of these will be included in the hypertext edition of the *Complete Letters of E.J. Pratt* (www.trentu.ca/pratt/) as of potential interest to scholars of Canadian literature, and this electronic edition will continue to expand over the years as new letters are identified. Owing to the duration, volume, and nature of his very active correspondence, this print volume in the *Complete Works* series is a selection – although a carefully expansive one.

This volume contains only letters from E.J. Pratt, with the other side of the correspondence cited in explanatory notes where it is available and useful in deciphering Pratt's meaning. Much of Pratt's letter writing is 'incidental,' consisting of brief, rather cryptic notes confirming appointments or conveying congratulations to colleagues and friends. In the early decades of the twentieth century before telephones and then computers took their place on every desk and in every home, such correspondence was commonplace. The current equivalent is the standard email message: a brief written communication presented without context which nonetheless makes perfect sense to the writer and the recipient. These have been omitted from the print collection, unless the context or the personal connection is judged to hold special significance to scholars of Canadian literature and culture.

In addition, three main blocks of correspondence have been winnowed, with care to provide sufficient indications of the nature of Pratt's activities and relationships.

- 1 From 1930 to 1952, Pratt taught summer school in Halifax, British Columbia, or Kingston, and carried on an almost daily correspondence with his wife and daughter in which he detailed his activities and (when a poem was in the offing) his research. Where the letters recount research – for example, for *Brébeuf and His Brethren* in Kingston the summer of 1939 or *Behind the Log* in Halifax in the summer of 1945 – they are included; but where they simply focus on arrangements for family outings, they are 'selected.'
- 2 From January 1936 to August 1943, during which time Pratt served as the founding editor of *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, much of his correspondence consists of solicitation of material or brief indications of acceptance of a poem. Representative selections have been made. Appreciation or constructive criticism is rare but has been retained when it occurs.
- 3 Finally, in 1945 when Claire Pratt attended graduate school in New York, and again after his retirement in 1953 when her career took her to Cambridge and Boston, the mass of correspondence is with his absent daughter. It provides an extraordinary picture of the relationship between proud and anxious father, and his intellectually ambitious and physically frail daughter, but like many familial conversations it is often concerned with minute and highly repetitive rehearsal of details of daily life. Representative examples have been retained.

For the convenience of readers, and to emphasize the evolution of the implied narrative embodied in the letters, the correspondence has been presented in eight chronological groupings roughly corresponding to major divisions in David Pitt's two-volume biography of the author:

- I Peregrinations: 1903–1925
- II A Taste of National Acclaim: 1925–1932
- III Prospect and Promotion: 1932–1939
- IV Historical Fact and Epic Construction: 1939–1944
- V Steering between Extremes: 1944–1948
- VI Knockings at the Door: 1948–1953
- VII Accepting the Years: 1953–1955
- VIII As Good as Any Old Horse My Age: 1955–1964

Sources and Locations

The substantial volume and range of letters making up this edition in its print and electronic versions is owing to three main factors.

- 1 The first is Pratt's extraordinary self-confidence as a writer. He had a late start – not seriously attempting to write until 1914, when, at the age of 32, he fell under the influence of Pelham Edgar and his poetry group at Victoria College. However, he never doubted that he would be a good or even great poet. His letters indicate periodic wrestling with subject, technique, research, or revision, and frequently demonstrate concerns about how to reach a wider readership to gain prestige or greater financial returns by finding British or American publishers, but they reflect no crises of faith in his own abilities. With the exception of two early efforts – *Clay* and *Rachel* – Pratt preserved his manuscripts, while Viola and then Claire Pratt carefully preserved the letters written to them during Pratt's frequent absences from home.
- 2 The second factor is Pratt's close connection from the beginning of his career with Victoria University at the University of Toronto. Responding to a request from Charles D. Abbott, Director of Libraries at the University of Buffalo, for manuscripts for the Modern Poetry Collection of the Lockwood Memorial Library, Pratt acknowledges 'technical difficulties here at my own University,' specifically 'a tacit understanding with the President and Librarian of Victoria College to pass over the manuscripts to the Library some time in the future' (28 January 1945). In the same letter, he also, in a (somewhat disingenuous) excuse for his appalling handwriting, claims that the manuscripts of his poems are nearly indecipherable because,

[i]n writing a poem I never conceived the possibility that anyone would ever be interested in the original; hence the chaos. Any reader or student would at once infer that the author had creeping paralysis. And again, the composition is mixed up in the same book with drafts of speeches, letters and lectures. However, I shall take a look through them and see if anything is available. I shall have to consult the College in any case. (p. 312)

Victoria College evidently held him to the 'tacit understanding,' and in 1946–7 Pratt made an initial donation of manuscripts, inaugurating the Pratt Collection. However, the volume of early material indicates that the possibility had been broached with him much earlier in his literary career, for he and his family habitually saved both manuscripts and copies of his letters from the time of the publication of *Newfoundland Verse* in 1923.

Further material was purchased by Victoria University from Viola Pratt in 1967–8, with additional donations from Mrs Pratt in 1978, and from Viola and Claire Pratt in 1985 and 1988. The family correspondence from this later period (after 1946) is frequently edited (i.e., photocopied with pieces of white paper covering sections of text – often a few lines at the beginning or ending of the letters). However, Claire Pratt’s papers, which came to the library at her death in 1995, contain both additional letters and unedited originals of letters previously included as photocopies in the E.J. Pratt Collection. Almost without exception, the material excised from Pratt’s letters by the family included either self-deprecating stories by Pratt of his own absent-mindedness or ineptitude, or specific details of Claire Pratt’s medical condition and her father’s attempts to make financial arrangements for her treatment and future maintenance.

Over the years, Victoria University Library has extended the collection to include letters from Martha Eugenie Perry (acquired in 1979 from the Provincial Archives of British Columbia), E.K. and Margaret Brown (acquired in 1980 from Margaret Brown), and Irving Layton (photocopies of the Concordia University Library, 1980).

In addition, the letters of several of Pratt’s principal correspondents are preserved in the collections of such institutions as the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto (Earl Birney, William Arthur Deacon and the Canadian Authors Association, and A.J.M. Smith), Queen’s University (George Herbert Clark, Frederick C. Gullen, Lorne A. Pierce), McMaster University (Hugh Eayrs, Winnie Eayrs, Ellen Elliott, John M. Gray, and other employees of Macmillan Canada), the University of New Brunswick (Desmond Pacey and Charles G.D. Roberts), the University of Waterloo (Jenny and Newton Pincock), the University of Saskatchewan (Ralph Gustafson), and Library and Archives Canada (Charles Clay, A.M. Klein, F.R. Scott, and several others). A few letters remain in the private collections of scholars (most notably David G. Pitt and Sandra Djwa). A complete list of these sources is included in the digest of abbreviations used in this volume (‘Abbreviations,’ pp. 673–6).

- 3 The third major source of material derives from David G. Pitt’s decades of research for his award-winning biography, *E.J. Pratt: The Truant Years* and *E.J. Pratt: The Master Years*. In interviews with Pratt’s family, friends, and colleagues, copies or transcriptions of letters were offered in evidence of tales told by Leo Cox, Arthur Phelps, and others. In some cases, the originals remain with the correspondent or his family. In other cases, additional letters have been shaken loose by the biographer’s interest that were unavailable at the time of his research – the most notable examples being several letters to Arthur Phelps from the early days of their acquaintance and literary

apprenticeship (1918–27) and several to Ronald G. Everson from the 1950s, when he was mentored by Pratt on resuming writing verse. These are now housed with their papers in the University of Manitoba and McMaster University archives respectively. There is no doubt that the publication of Pratt's biography sensitized owners of letters to their value to students of Pratt's life and work.

Presentation and Textual Notes

The editorial approach in this volume is very conservative. Pratt's correspondence is almost always handwritten. It is seldom formal, and is expressive, jovial, and opinionated, resulting in an idiosyncratic style. So as not to dilute the colloquial effect, features such as Pratt's erratic capitalization and the progressive indentations of his complex closings have been retained. However, obvious inconsistencies in spelling and punctuation have been corrected.

Correction of accidentals is made without notation. For example, punctuation at the end of lines is frequently replaced with a line break. In these cases, the comma or period has been provided. Typographical standardization has also been applied to some of Pratt's distinctive habits of penmanship. For example, 9th has been recorded as 9th; M^{rs} and M^{rs} as Mrs; indications of the hour as 1.30 or 1³⁰ as 1:30; and \$2⁰⁰ as \$2.00.

In addition, the following categories of accidentals have been regularized in accordance with the 'house' style of the University of Toronto Press: quotation marks (single, with double quotation marks for interior quotes) and ellipsis points (triple throughout). Canadian spelling conventions have been followed throughout.

The exception to the general practice of silent correction of accidentals is Pratt's misspelling or mistaken recording of the names of persons, organizations, or books. Because they frequently elicit comment or correction in subsequent correspondence (often from Pratt himself), these have been left uncorrected in the text of the letters. These are indicated in explanatory notes by [*sic*], with the correct form supplied.

Substantive emendations have been made only when a passage is incoherent as it stands – usually because a word or punctuation mark has been left out – and the correct alternative is obvious. All substantive emendations are indicated in endnotes. Interpolations are made where sense requires and are indicated by square brackets, []. The editorial notation [*sic*] is used in notes to indicate apparent inconsistencies and errors; it has not been used within the text of the letters themselves.

There are no editorial annotations in the main text. Indecipherable words are indicated by brackets enclosing ellipsis points, each corresponding to a

letter: e.g., ‘in the [...] these days.’ Uncertain words are followed by a question mark in brackets: e.g., ‘has much weighting[?]’. Likely constructions are indicated within square brackets: e.g., ‘betel[geu]se hea[ve]nly.’

Where text has been blocked out by the family before photocopying a letter for inclusion in the Pratt Collection, [] indicates the deletion. An indication of the size of the deletion (e.g., approximately four lines) has been made in the textual notes.

The only editorial ellipsis in this volume is designed to reduce repetition of return address. Return addresses provided by Pratt in handwriting or type are considered to be part of the text of the letter. However, the vast majority of Pratt’s correspondence is written from Victoria College on stationery with variations on the college letterhead. These and other frequently used letterheads – *Canadian Poetry Magazine* and personal addresses – are indicated in abbreviated form in the textual notes. Unique or infrequently used letterheads are indicated in full.

Where letters are not dated or where dates are partially indicated, the presumed date is included in square brackets: e.g., ‘[late April/early May 1922]’ or ‘Monday 23 [March 1918].’

Explanatory Notes

The primary function of the explanatory notes is to gloss obscure terms and references, and to identify persons, events, and texts. Full annotation of the identities of people addressed or named in the letters is made once, usually when their name first appears. Where subsequent references to a person are not clear (for example, where only a first name or a common last name is used in a letter), an explanatory note will clarify his or her identity and/or the specific context of the reference. The hypertext edition of the letters contains an exhaustive index of every person, organization, and institution mentioned in Pratt’s letters.

Citations to Pratt’s published writings are to the *Complete Works of E.J. Pratt* (University of Toronto Press), except where references are to specific editions or drafts of Pratt’s poems.

The main sources of information are:

- David G. Pitt, *E.J. Pratt: The Truant Years 1882–1927* (University of Toronto Press, 1984) and *E.J. Pratt: The Master Years 1927–1964* (University of Toronto Press, 1987)
- Lila Laakso, ‘Descriptive Bibliography,’ in *E.J. Pratt: Complete Poems*, ed. Sandra Djwa and R.G. Moyles (University of Toronto Press, 1989), 2:373–497

- Material in the Victoria University Library (Toronto, Ontario), including the E.J. Pratt Collection, the Claire Pratt Collection, and *Acta Victoriana*.

Because the choice to publish in Canada, the United States, or England is at issue in Pratt's lifetime and letters, all bibliographic notes include the place of publication.

Appendix

The appendix (pp. 665–9) includes letters written by Viola Pratt on Pratt's behalf toward the end of his life when he could write few letters himself, and several written shortly after his death on 26 April 1964.

In addition, for the convenience of scholars, some Pratt family letters that provide a sense of Pratt's early life in Newfoundland, and a complete index to the hundreds of letters which do not appear in this volume, including source and/or location as well as a brief indication of their contents, can be found at: www.trentu.ca/pratt/ (*EJP: Web*). The hypertext edition also houses a master index to these and other documents in the form of a 'Timeline' keyed to all letters, manuscripts, and printed editions of Pratt's work.

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Acknowledgments

The process by which this volume of letters has come into existence began in the final years of E.J. Pratt's life when David Pitt first approached the poet about writing a biography. Along with scores of interviews with Pratt, his family, colleagues, and friends, Pratt's letters provided the foundation for the award-winning two-volume biography *E.J. Pratt: The Truant Years 1882–1927* (1984) and *The Master Years 1927–1964* (1987). Despite Pratt's insistence in 1961 to H. Pearson Gundy, head librarian at Queen's University, that 'I haven't preserved a syllable – not a letter' (24 October 1961), his frequent requests that letters be returned to him, and the extensive collection of original and photocopied letters housed with Pratt's manuscripts in the Canadiana collection of the E.J. Pratt Library at Victoria College, University of Toronto, indicate that he had developed the habit of retaining at least some of his correspondence – a habit no doubt encouraged by the avid interest of librarians and academic colleagues at Victoria College. The careful stewardship of Pratt's archival memory has been continued over the years by the staff of the E.J. Pratt Library, particularly bibliographer Lila Laakso and recently retired chief librarian Dr Robert Brandeis, a fact appreciated by Pratt's daughter Claire, who passed on her role as literary executor to Victoria College on her death in 1995, along with numerous letters and other papers to which the family had previously restricted access.

That so many of his correspondents retained Pratt's letters is indicative of his many sociable and professional relationships with key figures involved in the 'making of Canadian culture' in the 1920s, '30s, '40s, and '50s. When David Pitt was amassing witnesses and documentary evidence for his biography, many of Pratt's friends and associates were generous enough to share these letters in the form of original manuscripts, photocopies, transcriptions, or tape-recorded readings. The biographical process encouraged Viola and Claire Pratt to add their papers to the archival collections at Victoria College, and made other correspondents aware of the significance of their keepsake letters, many of which have since come into archival collections across Canada.

For an indication of the extraordinary number of contributors to David Pitt's biographical research, we refer readers to his prefaces to *E.J. Pratt: The Truant Years* and *E.J. Pratt: The Master Years*. Most notable among the many who helped bring that project to completion was, of course, Marion Pitt with her extraordinary facility at reading Pratt's quite extraordinarily bad handwriting. In that research and in Elizabeth Popham's subsequent search for additional letters, the staff of libraries and special collections across Canada and the United States have provided invaluable assistance. (See "Abbreviations," pp. 673–6, for a complete list.) In particular, we would like to acknowledge the assistance over the years of the staff of the E.J. Pratt Library at Victoria College, most recently Robert Brandeis, Lisa Sherlock, Agatha Barc, Colin Deinhardt, and Halyna Kazar. All of the images that appear in this volume are used by permission of Victoria University (University of Toronto).

In the editorial process, Elizabeth Popham is grateful for the advice of David Pitt and the support of other members of the Pratt Editorial Committee (Sandra Djwa, Susan Gingell, W.J. Keith, Lila Laakso, Perry Millar, and Zailig Pollock) and Advisory Board (David Bentley, Claude Bissell, Robert Brandeis, Peter Buitenhuis, Michael Darling, Douglas Lochhead, Jay Macpherson, Malcolm Ross, David Staines, and Brian Trahearne). The hypertext edition has been developed by Elizabeth Popham in close cooperation with the editors of *E.J. Pratt: Selected Poems* (2000) and the hypertext *Complete Poems* (1998–), particularly Zailig Pollock, the foremost textual editor at work in Canada today. Research assistance to Elizabeth Popham was provided over the years by Trent University students Jennifer Bistolas, Catherine Downey, Luke Tromly, Daphne Uras, and Sarah Miller, and assistance with the initial design of the hypertext edition by Christine Rudin and Jason Verbovski.

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Biographical Chronology

- 1882 Born 4 February at Western Bay, Newfoundland; third child of eight of the Rev John Pratt, Yorkshire-born clergyman, and Fanny Pitts Knight, daughter of a Newfoundland sea captain
- 1888–1902 Educated in outport schools and at the Methodist College, StJohn's, with a three-year intermission, 1897–1900, as a clerk in a dry-goods store
- 1902–4 Teacher at Moreton's Harbour, a fishing village in Notre Dame Bay
- 1904–7 Probationary minister in the Methodist ministry at Clarke's Beach-Cupids and Bell Island-Portugal Cove
- 1907–11 Student in philosophy, Victoria College, University of Toronto; BA, 1911
- 1912 Received MA degree, University of Toronto
- 1913 Received BD degree; ordained into the Methodist ministry
- 1913–20 Demonstrator-lecturer in psychology, University of Toronto; assistant minister in a number of churches around Streetsville, Ontario
- 1917 Received PhD from University of Toronto. His thesis, *Studies in Pauline Eschatology and Its Background*, was published in Toronto; *Rachel: A Sea Story of Newfoundland in Verse* was printed privately in New York
- 1918 Married Viola Whitney (BA, Victoria College, 1913), 20 August
- 1920 Joined Department of English, Victoria College
- 1921 Birth of only child, Mildred Claire, 18 March
- 1923 *Newfoundland Verse*, first commercially published book of poems
- 1925 *The Witches' Brew* published in London
- 1926 *Titans* published in London, *The Witches' Brew* in Toronto
- 1927 *The Iron Door (An Ode)* published in Toronto
- 1930 Appointed professor, Department of English, Victoria College; elected fellow of the Royal Society of Canada; *The Roosevelt and*

- the Antinoe* published in New York; *Verses of the Sea*, with introduction by Charles G.D. Roberts, published in Toronto
- 1930–52 Taught summer school at Dalhousie, Queen's, and the University of British Columbia
- 1932 *Many Moods* published in Toronto
- 1935 *The Titanic* published in Toronto
- 1936 One of the founders and first editor, from January 1936 to August 1943, of *Canadian Poetry Magazine*
- 1937 *The Fable of the Goats and Other Poems* published in Toronto, winner of the Governor General's Award
- 1938 Appointed senior professor, Victoria College
- 1940 *Brébeuf and His Brethren* published in Toronto, winner of the Governor General's Award; awarded the Royal Society's Lorne Pierce Gold Medal for distinguished service to Canadian literature
- 1941 *Dunkirk* published in Toronto
- 1943 *Still Life and Other Verse* published in Toronto
- 1944 *Collected Poems* published in Toronto
- 1945 *Collected Poems*, with introduction by William Rose Bénét, published in New York; *They Are Returning* published in Toronto; received DLitt from University of Manitoba, first honorary degree (others: LLD, Queen's 1948; DCL, Bishop's 1949; DLitt, McGill 1949; DLitt, Toronto 1953; DLitt, Assumption 1955; DLitt, New Brunswick 1957; DLitt, Western Ontario 1957; DLitt, Memorial 1961)
- 1946 Created Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George in the King's Honours List
- 1947 *Behind the Log* and *Ten Selected Poems* published in Toronto
- 1952 *Towards the Last Spike* published in Toronto, winner of the Governor General's Award; awarded the University of Alberta Gold Medal for distinguished service to Canadian literature; member of the editorial board, from 20 December 1952 to 13 September 1958, of *Saturday Night*
- 1953 retired from Victoria College; appointed professor emeritus of English
- 1955 elected honorary president of the Canadian Authors Association
- 1957 received Canada Council Award on seventy-fifth birthday
- 1958 *The Collected Poems of E.J. Pratt*, 2nd ed., edited by Northrop Frye, published in Toronto
- 1959 received Civic Award of Merit from the City of Toronto
- 1961 received the Canada Council Medal for distinction in the field of literature
- 1963 elected honorary member of the Empire Club of Canada; elected first honorary member of the Arts and Letters Club
- 1964 died in Toronto, 26 April

LETTERS

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I Peregrinations, 1903–1925

... exploring the country to find out the chances

E.J. Pratt to Reverend Charles E. Manning, 8 July 1908

TO THE EDITOR, *THE COLLEGIAN*¹

Moreton's Harbour

[Sept. 1903]

Dear Sir,

Would it be too much to ask you to reckon me as one of your candidates, and to put my name amongst the others in the list of undergraduates in the Collegian. I got through wholly and absolutely upon the strength of the 1902 and previous year's grinding.

Yours truly,
Edwin J. Pratt

¹ A monthly publication of the Methodist College, St John's, Newfoundland. Pratt was a student there from 1900 to 1902, when he completed his Junior Matriculation (Grade XI, then known as 'Associate of Arts'). In the summer of 1903 he passed the external matriculation examinations of the University of London, and wrote this letter to *The Collegian*.

TO BARBARA BRETT²

Clarke's Beach
Conception Bay

Sept. 22nd/04

My dear Barbara,

I must congratulate you upon gaining such a high place in the first division of Preliminary.³ I quite expected that you would pass and secure Honours in some subjects. Everyone of the seven Preliminaries that went in passed, but you have gained first place.

Both Nina & Ida have also passed in Primary.⁴ I suppose you have seen the Exam. list.

You have gained Honours in both French & English. If you had a few more marks you would have gained your \$4 prize for English.

Emily French also has 2 Hons. One in French & one in Hygiene.

Hettie Burt has Hons. in French.

The three boys have passed, & Clara in 2nd division.

But I am really delighted with your work. I knew all the year by your close attention to your work that you would figure a good place in the Exam. list. Don't forget to keep up your English & French. Have you a teacher yet this year?

Poor little Flossie.⁵ How much she would have wished to have taken the Exams. I suppose by this time you have got tired of Holidays, and want to get at your studies again.

I have not heard much of Moretons Hbr. School since Sept. and would like to know how things are working along.

I want you to write me and let me know, especially if the marks have come, and get them copied off to send me.

Honours in the Hygiene came to Emily. I know you were not far behind in that subject.

2 Brett (1890–1983) was one of Pratt's students when he taught at Moreton's Harbour (1902–4).

She earned a BA from Mount Allison University and taught for forty years in Newfoundland schools, including Grand Falls Academy.

3 Grades 7 and 8.

4 Grade 6. (Public examinations were held in all grades from Primary to Junior Matriculation.)

5 Barbara's cousin Flossie Brett died in the winter of 1904.

Anyway go on, continue to study as you have in the past and there won't be much chances of failure with you.

A girl that keeps to her work and doesn't put pleasure and amusement before it will always succeed. Don't fail to write this return mail.

I remain

Yours very sincerely

E.J. Pratt

P.S. Give my congratulations to Emily, Hettie & Clara & the boys. Remember me to Hedley,⁶ your mother & father and your cousins.

E.J.P.

TO WILLIS PIKE⁷

Victoria University
Toronto

January 26th 08.

Dear Uncle Billy,

How are you getting along at all? Still at the plant I suppose and getting almost sick of it EH! Do you ever have any muscles and pigs tongues now-adays? They don't know how to cook things like that up here in Toronto. If you ever do get a bit of cabbage it is no good because it is not boiled in Pork. But, however, I have no reason for complaint as I can get all the fruit I want at a low cost. I often think of the fun I used to have when about seven or eight o'clock I would go down and have an hour's chat at your house. I often think of the Bill Roost and the J.S.⁸ I fancy I can hear dear little Mummu⁹ saying it now, 'I give ow the Bill oost' the dear little thing. I would so much like to see her again and take her out for a little walk. And Gladdie and Maisie. I suppose they go to school all along. How is Mrs Pike? Mother often mentions her ever since the time she saw her at her house. She knows all about our duck supper and laughs a lot when I tell her of it. I eat so

⁶ Barbara's older brother.

⁷ A Bell Island resident. Pratt frequently visited Pike and his wife and three daughters in 1905–7 when he was a probationary minister on the Portugal Cove-Bell Island Methodist circuit.

⁸ Possibly local boats.

⁹ Muriel.

much that night I thought I could hardly get home afterwards. I saw hobgoblins and ghosts all night in my sleep after it.¹⁰ OH! these were good times. I suppose your new couch is getting worn a little bit by this time. Is the pump working satisfactorily, and have you got your Masonic flag up yet?

Does Mr Alty¹¹ go in to see you very often? I suppose things are going ahead as usual. Did you get the photograph I sent you some time ago. I sent one to Mrs Whiteway and addressed it 2 Monroe Street. I do not know if she had changed house at that time or not.

I am living here¹² with a Mr & Mrs Hanna just across from the University. Will Pike¹³ & Soper¹⁴ are here with me in the same house. I am very fond of the work. I am taking an Arts Course and like it immensely. If I knew the address of your brother I should go to see him. There are several friends of mine here in Toronto whom I should have gone to see but I haven't got their address. It is such a big city that a person may become lost in the different streets if he doesn't take care. You should see the three of us sometimes getting supper. We go out to a restaurant for dinner. But sometimes we get hungry about 10 o'clock in the night and I put the kettle over the gas jet and make a grand cup of cocoa with milk. We have everything like that here. OH for a roast duck or a dish of pigs tongues. I only wish that Mrs Pike could take a peep in at us once in a while. I know that she would laugh.

Give my best regards to her, and give Mumu and Maisie and Gladdie I suppose if she hasn't got too big by this time, a good kiss for me.

I remain
yours Sincerely
E.J. Pratt

P.S. I've got out of the J.S. luck altogether since I came here.

10 According to Viola Pratt, Pratt's poem 'The Pursuit' (*MM*, 48; *EJP*: *CP* 1.290) was based on his recollection of a nightmare 'caused by a surfeit of roast duck when he was a student minister in Newfoundland.'

11 Thomas Alty, the student minister who succeeded Pratt at Bell Island when he left to attend Victoria College, Toronto in 1907.

12 A boarding house on St George Street, Toronto, where Pratt lived during his first year at Victoria College.

13 William H. Pike (no relation to Willis Pike), another Newfoundland-born probationary minister, friend and classmate of Pratt. Ordained in 1911, he served ethnic missions in western Canada.

14 Samuel Soper, also a Newfoundland-born probationer, friend, and classmate of Pratt. He served for many years after his ordination as a missionary of the Methodist (later United) Church in China.

TO REVEREND CHARLES E. MANNING¹⁵

Turner
Macoun
Saskatchewan

July 8th 08.

Dear Mr Manning,

I thought I might drop you a line to give you a brief idea of the Mission work out here in Estevan West. I arrived at Estevan about the 20th of June and got out to my Mission on the following day. I spent the first three weeks exploring the country to find out the chances of establishing a good Mission Centre, and at last decided upon Turner, a farming district as my headquarters. I visited all the homesteads within a radius of 20 miles and arranged for three appointments every Sunday. The morning appointment is at Shire's about 7 or 8 miles South. I hold the service in a large shack, then drive back¹⁶ to Magoons¹⁷ and hold the afternoon service at that place after which I drive across the Country about 20 miles and take the third appointment at the small town of Hitchcock on the railway line. The meeting there is held in the schoolhouse and the congregation has been growing continually until last Sunday night the building was filled. I am delighted with the work, especially as the farmers take such an interest in the cause, some leaving their homesteads in the evening and coming as much as fifteen miles in the round trip in order to attend the service. The district is an entirely new one, eighty per cent of the homesteaders having come within the last three or four years. Cash is at present scarce on that account, but the crops give every indication of a good harvest and the financial prospects are therefore encouraging. With regard to the question of travelling expenses from Toronto as far as Winnipeg and back, if the people here are willing to pay all those expenses incurred by my coming to the Mission, that is refund what I have already paid out of my own pocket for my trip to Winnipeg as well as the remainder which, it

15 Secretary of the Home Mission Board of the Methodist Church. Pratt was writing from his student mission field in southeastern Saskatchewan.

16 By horse and buggy.

17 That summer Pratt boarded with homesteader William Magoon and his family. According to his daughter, Esther (Magoon) Bailey, he was the first to call Pratt 'Ned'. For several years Magoon managed a generally unproductive farm to which Pratt acquired mortgaged title in the summer of 1908. Pratt disposed of the farm in 1911, exchanging it for real estate in Toronto.

has already been agreed, shall be paid, would there be any objection to receiving it? Several have mentioned the fact to me, that it would not be difficult to raise enough by a special collection if the crops are good, to defray the total expenses from and back to Toronto, while if there was then a surplus it would of course go into the common fund. I said I should write and get instructions from you.

I shall a little later forward on the repayment of the loan of \$40.00 you so kindly lent me in May and wishing your every success in your work.

I remain
yours sincerely
E.J. Pratt

TO VIOLA WHITNEY (LATER MRS E.J. PRATT)¹⁸

159¹⁹

Thursday
July 5, 1917

My dearest,

I have just finished typewriting 'Rachel',²⁰ and am now sending a copy of it to your dear self.

18 Viola Whitney Pratt (1893–1984) was born in Atherley, Ontario, and was a graduate of Victoria College and the Ontario College of Education. She married Pratt in August 1918, and was the efficient manager of their very busy household. In addition to being her husband's first reader and assisting with research for his books, she was an editor for the United Church Publishing House (Toronto) and founding editor of the United Church's children's magazine *World Friends* (1929–55). She wrote and published several books, including *Famous Doctors: Osler, Banting, Penfield* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1956) and *Journeying with the Year* (Toronto: The Women's Missionary Society of the United Church of Canada, 1957), a collection of short pieces for young readers, mostly her own. Intensely interested in the study of comparative religions, a social activist and popular public speaker, she was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Sacred Letters by Victoria College for her 'outstanding literary contributions and ... rare combination of intellect, temperament, and faith.'

19 159 Cumberland Street, Toronto

20 *Rachel: A Sea Story of Newfoundland in Verse* (EJP: CP 1.20) was Pratt's first long narrative and first Newfoundland poem. Begun in 1916 after a brief visit to Newfoundland, it was printed privately in 1917. A portion of the poem appeared in *NV*, but it was not published in its entirety until 1962 in *HTF*.

I am also this morning sending one to Dr Edgar²¹ at Camp Kapuskasing.²² I am anxious to see what he has to say. Shall send you his report just when I see it.

Am going back to Streetsville²³ this afternoon, but will be in the city for a day or two early next week.

Lovingly
Ned

TO DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT²⁴

Victoria College
Toronto, Ont.

Jan. 18th 18.

Dear Mr Duncan Campbell Scott,
Ottawa.

Dear Mr Scott,

I am taking the liberty of sending you a little message of appreciation although unknown to you personally.²⁵ I had the pleasure last week of spending an evening at the home of Dr Edgar, an esteemed friend of yours, and no less beloved of mine. In the course of the evening by the fire, he read to me selections from 'Lundy Lane,'²⁶ particularly, that magnificent 'Height of Land.' I had known the poem for a considerable time, but its growing beauty was so vividly impressed

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- 21 Oscar Pelham Edgar (1871–1948) was born in Ottawa and educated at Upper Canada College, the University of Toronto, and Johns Hopkins University. He was appointed to Victoria College to teach French, but in 1902 became head of its Department of English, a post he held until his retirement in 1938. He was a distinguished scholar and author, and mentor to many noted scholars and writers, including Pratt, whom he appointed to the English Department in 1920.
- 22 An internment camp for prisoners of war and 'enemy aliens' near the northern Ontario town of Kapuskasing. Edgar was on duty there for the War Department in the summer of 1917.
- 23 A community on the western outskirts of Toronto, now part of Mississauga. Pratt served there as a 'summer supply' minister in 1917.
- 24 (1862–1947). Ottawa-born poet Duncan Campbell Scott served for many years in the federal Department of Indian Affairs. His books include *The Magic House and Other Poems* (Ottawa: J. Durie, 1893) and *Lundy's Lane and Other Poems* (1916), *Beauty and Life* (1921), and *The Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott* (1926), all published by McClelland & Stewart.
- 25 Shortly thereafter, Pratt met Scott at Pelham Edgar's home and recited some of his verse for him.
- 26 An error for *Lundy's Lane and Other Poems*, Scott's most recent book of verse.

upon me as he read it, that I asked him if you would not think it presumptuous, were I to write you and express my appreciation directly. He replied that you would be glad to get a line from any lover of poetry, and especially from one who had read and loved your own work. As such conditions are most thoroughly fulfilled in my case, I feel at liberty to write.

Three or four years ago, Arthur Phelps²⁷ – a college class-mate of mine – and I undertook to make a special study of Canadian poetry, and we soon found our interest mainly centered in Archibald Lampman,²⁸ Marjorie Pickthall²⁹ and yourself. ‘The Height of Land’ and the ‘Lines to Edmund Morris’ just thrilled us, and I frankly confessed to a slight feeling of jealousy, when Phelps told me that you had written him, and occasionally had sent him some of your poetry. He is naturally enthusiastic over it. Whenever we fall out upon any point, we pay each other back our grudges by bombarding each other with sonnets, etc., each seeking to inflict upon the other the greater injury, – a phase of ballistics unknown to any theory of militarism.

If your health is good, Mr Scott, could you stand an attack? I should dearly love to submit a few poems under separate cover for your examination. I wanted to send some last year but could not muster up sufficient courage. Dr Edgar, however, gave me a new faith. Most of the verse springs out of the sea-faring life of Newfoundland, my native home.

And could you once in a while send me a poem of your own, – a new one? I should indeed be very proud.

Sincerely yours

E.J. Pratt.

27 Arthur Leonard Phelps (1887–1970) was born in Columbus, Ontario. He was ordained a Methodist minister in 1913, but left the ministry to teach English at Cornell College in Iowa (1920–1), Wesley College, later the University of Winnipeg (1921–45), and McGill University (1947–53). He published two slim books of verse, *Poems* (Mount Vernon, IA: The English Club of Cornell College, 1920) and *A Bobcaygeon Chapbook* (Lindsay, ON: Author 1922), but his chief literary work was as a critic and commentator on Canadian affairs in various CBC radio series. He and Pratt were lifelong friends.

28 Archibald Lampman (1861–99) was perhaps the most significant poet of the group known as the ‘Confederation Poets.’ Employed in the Post Office Department in Ottawa, he published several collections including *Among the Millet* (Ottawa: J. Durie, 1888) and *Lyrics of Earth* (Boston: Copeland and Day, 1885).

29 Marjorie Pickthall (1883–1922) was a librarian at Victoria College. Born in England, she lived in Toronto from 1890 to 1912. Before her early death, she published two books of poetry – *Drift of Pinions* (Montreal: University Magazine, 1913) and *The Lamp of Poor Souls* (Toronto: S.B. Gundy, 1916) – as well as the verse drama *The Woodcarver’s Wife* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1922), 200 short stories, and three novels, two for children.

TO ARTHUR PHELPS

Victoria College

Aug. 9th 18

My dear Art,

We had it planned to go up to Bob³⁰ on the Wed. Hincks,³¹ Hube³² & I. Hincks was taken down with severe grippe, and I have a funeral on at Shatwells.³³ We were disappointed because the balance of our time in August is so restricted. The wedding takes place on next Tuesday week³⁴ and if I knew that you & Lal³⁵ would be in Bob up to the [...] week in Sept., I would bring the girl up then. If not, I will try to get a run up next week probably Wed, but I am not sure, on account of the small event coming on so soon and the thousand and one things to look after. Let me hear from you soon. In the last couple of weeks financial prospects have rather unexpectedly follow[ed] a rather clouded turn, and I shall have to wait until things are definite before I dare take too much upon myself. Then I would like to run up at any rate, and see you both again.

Write soon.

Ned

30 Bobcaygeon, a small town in the Kawartha Lakes region about eighty miles northeast of Toronto.

31 Clarence ('Clare') Hincks (1885–1964) was a medical doctor and a prominent mental health specialist. In 1918, he and Dr C.K. Clarke (assisted by Pratt, then working as a demonstrator in psychology at the University of Toronto) founded the National Committee for Mental Hygiene (later the Canadian Mental Health Association) of which he was a director until 1952.

32 W. Hubert Greaves was an American of independent means who taught public speaking at Victoria College. He and his wife Cornelia often hosted Pratt at the elegant home 'upon the Humber's crested dome' celebrated in Pratt's lyric 'In a Beloved Home (To W.H.G.)' first published in *NV* (114; *EJP*: *CP* 1.111), and at their summer retreat near Kingston, Ontario. Greaves moved to Yale University in 1929. (See the note to 'a funny article in the Telegram' in the letter to Viola Pratt, 6 August 1945 [*EJP*: *Web*].)

33 Although he had completed his doctoral studies in 1917, Pratt still worked part-time as a minister.

34 Pratt had been engaged to Viola Whitney since 1914, but their marriage was delayed by Pratt's doctoral studies and difficulties finding full-time employment. They were married on 20 August 1918. Clare Hincks served as best man. (See the note to 'poor old Bob' in the letter to Phelps, 18 September 1918 [p. 13].)

35 Lila ('Lal') Irene Nicholls married Arthur Phelps in 1915.

TO ARTHUR PHELPS

Victoria College
Toronto, Ont.

Sept. 18th 18

Dearest old Art & Lal,

Your letter brought joy to me as all your letters do. Please do not talk about the time I gave you at Conway.³⁶ You gave me a rare, rich week³⁷ that I will not and can not forget. God bless your dear souls.

I was sorry I couldn't finally see my way clear for that Bob investment. But, as you say, the lot is in the family anyway, and whatever happens, Vie & I will see you & Lal often. If you can make Toronto in the fall, sure as guns, our apartments are yours, and all the salads, meats, chicken pies, etc. that a gas range can cook.

Hube was saying that he received six excellent sonnets from you which he will read to me when next we get together. Art, old man you must start writing again. Bring on your old-time spurts and inspirations and keep the muse ever by your side. You have genius – foster it. Bobcaygeon will be your Parnassus yet.

Let us know when you can come to Toronto, do.

I wonder what the fall is like at Conway. The hues will be turning in a week or so won't they? Have you & Lal got your coal in for the winter, to come down to earth for a minute. And has Lal started in on that school yet! My! But it will be grand if you two can spend the following year in Toronto. In the meantime, save! Save! With that end in view.

Vie & I had a splendid time at the Muldrew Lakes³⁸ – just got back last night. The devil of a job it is getting curtains, furniture, etc. No end to it. The men up at the Lakes were good to us beyond praise. We must have gained about five pounds each of solid pork over the three weeks. That is all my frail anatomy can stand. More than that and I would become corpulent – and I hate a paunch.

36 A vacation spot on Lake Ontario in the Adolphus Beach area.

37 Pratt had spent a few days in Bobcaygeon with his friends before his wedding on 20 August. (See the letter to Phelps, 9 August 1918 [p. 11].)

38 The Pratts' honeymoon was spent in the Muldrew Lakes, near Muskoka.

Poor old Bob³⁹ is over that concern now. He is making some improvement but slow – infernally slow.

Love to yourself & Lal,
From Vie and myself.
Ned.

TO ARTHUR PHELPS

Sept. 21st 18

Victoria College

Dearest old Art,

Your sonnet sequence warmed and throbbed my heart. Hube had spoken several times to me of their finality in fairly rapturous terms and we had it arranged to spend an hour or so over them. I love the very form of them as they stand under their numbers I, II, III, etc. The sentiment throughout is philosophically profound, but what caught my eyes most was the subtly-phrased contrast between the drab and the crimson, the world that is and the world we all hope for, ending up with the exquisite figure of the goldfinch. Hubert compares them to Mrs Browning's sonnets. I shall turn elsewhere for relationships. I am not a devotee of Elizabeth Barrett anyway, and I do not think her sonnets are equal to these.

The parts I like best are the opening lines of the first with the lure of that fire-place of yours, the fall of the withered crimson leaf into the pool, in the second, the sestet of the III especially the last four lines (these are among the best of any lines you have written), the extension and elaboration of the leaf simile in the 4th, and especially the closing sonnets the finesse of the six in structure, I think.

39 Robert LeDrew ('Bob') was a native of Brigus, Newfoundland, where Pratt had known him as a boy. When he came to Toronto in 1915, he and Pratt lived together in one of several houses they had built as part of a joint venture in real estate in 1916–17. In August, LeDrew was hospitalized for Hodgkin's disease and was replaced by Clare Hincks as best man at Pratt's wedding. He died in 1919.

Art, so right it is old boy. You have got the sonnets swing as none of the rest of us have. 'Thoughts,'⁴⁰ 'Cherries,' 'A perusal of a leaf etc. (the 'Poetry' sonnet),' and several others are among the best I have seen in many years of reading.

Greaves and I are going to spend a good hour over a pipe in the company of the last six.

For a little lyric of betel[geu]se hea[ve]nly, however, commend me to Sea Beauty. It is a given.

With best love to yourself and
Lal
Ned

TO ARTHUR PHELPS

Victoria College

[late Apr./early May 1922]

Dear Art,

Here's the Forum with the 'Ice-Floes.'⁴¹ It has been almost completely re-done since the summer, and looks very good I think. I worked like a devil on it and think it the *very best* I am capable of doing at the age of forty years. If it don't go over, well – ! I will soon hear I daresay. In the Forum there's also a thing by Doug Bush,⁴² a corker. I went into convulsions of merriment over it. You'll do the same I think. Hoping to see yourself before long. The best to Lal.

Ned.

40 Published in *Poems* (Mount Vernon, IA: The English Club of Cornell College, 1921), 9.

41 Pratt's poem 'The Ice-Floes' (*EJP: CP* 1.58) was first published in *CF* 2 (April 1922): 591–3.

42 Literary historian and critic Douglas Bush (1896–1983), who went on to have a distinguished career at Harvard University, was still a student at the University of Toronto. The 'thing' was an essay entitled 'A Plea for Original Sin' (*CF* 2 [April 1922]: 589–90), a Swiftian satire on the stultifying effects of Canadian mores on Canadian writing. The essay influenced Pratt's 'The Witches' Brew' written in the summer of 1923.

TO WILLIAM ARTHUR DEACON⁴³

Bobcaygeon, Ont.⁴⁴

Monday morning [18 Sept. 1922]

Dear Billy,

Would you like to run up to Bobcaygeon on a holiday for one, two, three or four days as your time would permit. Art Phelps and wife have just left for Winnipeg. My wife and bairn⁴⁵ are in Toronto and I am left alone in my cottage for one whole week ending Sept. 23rd. I have just shot two wild black ducks less than an hour ago. What am I going to do with them? They won't keep till my return and I can't eat them all by myself. Could you run up early in the week. The train leaves Toronto 9:05 a.m. and 5 p.m., and leaves Bobcaygeon 6:45 a.m. and 2:45 p.m. So good connections. Great sleeping here out in the open air and thoroughly screened in. Not a footstep day or night to disturb dreams. I have a little garden containing, at present, sweet corn, beans, tomatoes, squash and so on, clamouring for your stomach. An open fire place with pine stumps! Evening Smokes! Fresh Cream! Bass!!

Can you come? J.V. MacKenna⁴⁶ had arranged to come but was suddenly called to New York and so had Ernie McCullogh,⁴⁷ but he had, likewise, to cancel the trip.

If you can make it let me know by wire: Ned Pratt, Bobcaygeon and I will meet you, with canoe, at the station. Bring some of your stuff with you to while away an evening. Enjoyed 'Angels'⁴⁸ very much and several other articles.

Sincerely
Ned Pratt

43 (1890–1977). A classmate of Pratt and Phelps at Victoria College, who completed a law degree at the University of Manitoba, Deacon was literary editor of *Saturday Night* (1922–8), the *Toronto Mail and Empire* (1928–36), and the *Globe and Mail* (1936–60). A prolific freelance reviewer, critical essayist, and letter writer, he was Pratt's long-time friend, though their friendship vacillated from time to time because of Deacon's temperament.

44 Phelps bought a cottage in Bobcaygeon in 1919 and helped Pratt acquire one adjacent to his in 1921. The Pratts spent parts of fifteen summers there.

45 The Pratts' daughter, Mildred Claire, had been born in March 1921.

46 Unidentified.

47 A prominent Toronto physician.

48 An article by Deacon published in *Saturday Night*, 29 July 1922.

TO ARTHUR PHELPS

Victoria College

Oct. 26, 22

Hi there! You old bees-wax!

Hi there! you of the golden aureole!

How are ye? How are ye?

Why the Sam Hill, Art have I not received a line from you since your sail from Bobcaygeon? Here Lal has written Vi twice most devotedly, most voluminously, but ne'er a chirp from you.

I had a chat with Flint⁴⁹ the other day. The Chancellor,⁵⁰ Pro[vo] and I ate dinner together. Flint spoke most glowingly of you and your work as teacher and writer, the Chancellor himself chiming in in unison. Bowles says to Flint. Here's Pratt – Phelps' bosom chum. I smiled sweetly at the compliment and returned with an account of your efficient and vital activities in the Department of English hit at in medley.

Art, send me a sheaf of your stuff at once. We left you know without arranging our plans. I should like to submit a few to the Forum so they can select. Now do this at once, or I will absolutely refuse to write another letter. In fact, I will make subsequent correspondence subject to that condition. I had your chapbook⁵¹ uppermost on my desk. Several of my friends have been interested in it, and some warm appreciation rendered. Hubert⁵² likes the Spenserians⁵³ very much. In fact they are the favorites here with the Bob bits⁵⁴ coming a good second. How are things moving along? Anything new. W.G.⁵⁵ was here during

49 Charles W. Flint was president (1915–22) of Cornell College, a small Methodist institution in Mount Vernon, Iowa. In 1921, Phelps had left Cornell to take up a position in the Department of English at Wesley College in Winnipeg.

50 Reverend Richard Pinch Bowles (1864–1960), born in Ontario and a graduate of Victoria College, was its president and chancellor from 1913 to 1930.

51 Phelps had recently published *A Bobcaygeon Chapbook* (Lindsay, ON: Author, 1922).

52 W. Hubert Greaves.

53 A poetic sequence in the chapbook: 'Prelude and Invocation: Prefacing a Tale Told in the Spenserian Stanza.'

54 'Bits from Bobcaygeon,' a poem in the chapbook.

55 W.G. (William George) Smith (b. 1873) taught experimental psychology in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Toronto (1905–21) before moving to Wesley College (Winnipeg) as vice-principal and professor of philosophy and sociology in 1921. He had been Pratt's overseer in the psychology laboratories and supervisor of his dissertation research. Their relationship was one of 'chronic antagonism.' (See *EJP*: TY, 149, 152–4.)

Seniors Conference. Turned down all along the line I understand, excepting Bland⁵⁶ and Endicott⁵⁷ who spoke in favor of the right of the professor with a gu[arantee] to a hearing.⁵⁸ Nothing further than that. I didn't see him at all except at the Alumni Dinner.

Am plunged in work up to the crop. Enjoying it immensely. Have not done any writing, nor do I expect to get a chance this year. Must wait till next summer. I showed Hube my summer stuff.⁵⁹ He did not care very much for any of that realistic dialogue. I guess it smelled too much of the tar and fish and oil – too local in its flavor. The Scholar and the Salt too much Earth Earthy, or of the Sea, Sea-y. Didn't like much John Jones, not enough discussion. He says he likes the graver, more sombre and elevated lines. Liked Newfoundland very much and the Toll of the Bells & Magnolia Blossoms,⁶⁰ but nothing else. In fact he lamented my lapse into Realism. I told him that I felt my heart strangely warmed toward these old salts and their ways and meant to do more of it ... when time permitted. I told him how I liked your Knock Rovey and the *stick stick stick*.⁶¹ He can't see it. I have not submitted anything to the Forum of my

- 56 S.G. (Salem Goldworth) Bland (1859–1950) was a leader of the social gospel movement. He had taught New Testament and Church History at Wesley College from 1903 until his forced retirement on economic grounds in 1917. Like Smith, he had challenged his dismissal. (See Horn, *Academic Freedom in Canada: A History* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999], 50–2).
- 57 Norman Endicott, a professor of English at University College, Toronto. Pratt, for reasons unknown, is said to have 'heartily disliked him.'
- 58 Earlier in 1922, Smith had been dismissed from his position as vice-principal of Wesley College, ostensibly for voicing heretical opinions. However, it is more likely that he was removed for attempting to introduce academic programming in keeping with the Social Gospel – a radical change only four years after the Winnipeg General Strike. The appeal court of the Methodist Church had refused to hear his appeal. (See Horn, *Academic Freedom in Canada*, 80–2 and Stephen Harold Riggins, "A Square Deal for the Least and the Last': The Career of W.G. Smith in the Methodist Ministry, Experimental Psychology, and Sociology," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 27, no. 2 [2012]: 179–222.)
- 59 Many of the poems included in *NV* were written in the summer of 1922.
- 60 'Newfoundland' (*NV*, 887–90; *EJP: CP* 1.99); 'The Toll of the Bells' (*NV*, 15–16; *EJP: CP* 1.68); 'Magnolia Blossoms' (*NV*, 18–19; *EJP: CP* 1.69).
- 61 Phelps's poem 'Knock Rovey' has a very aggressive metre. In the preface to *A Bobcaygeon Chapbook*, Phelps records Pratt's friendly appreciation of his work, and this poem in particular: 'Ned Pratt (Dr. E.J. Pratt, Victoria College, Toronto, who of a morning comes down through his raspberry patch, climbs the line fence, and makes me swing my legs back across the breakfast bench to turn and say "well, but Ned ..."), Ned Pratt should be publishing a chapbook this summer. He has too much dignity and reticence. He embarrasses me by making me notice my lack of too much. All being Well he'll publish a real chapbook of quality next summer. That's why I am happy when he says he likes KNOCK ROVEY and the lines [from 'Prelude and Invocation'], "teaching a vagrant line to match / A pacing moment that fine eloquence."'

own yet except John Jones⁶² which was liked quite heartily. It may come out through the winter.

Have not had an opening yet to show Pelham⁶³ any of it. I am waiting for the chance to come from him both for you and for myself. He is somewhat reticent this year for some reason. Verbally he is still akin to Canadian things as a result of [...] atmosphere and wines. Brown [...] [...] when read. Neither did Hube like the Bird of Paradise, or at least he maintained silence on it after being shown that amorous effusion. He liked your People with the exception of the line – ‘from that bed get up’⁶⁴ (By the way, send on any subscription to the Forum, Brody’s⁶⁵ at al.) Hube is smitten with *Louise*.⁶⁶ Can’t read anything else now till the epidemic is over. Still the v[ai]n boy is as friendly with me again as if nothing had ever occurred. God moves in a mysterious way. Did you get any comments from Pierce⁶⁷ on the stuff? Or did he sniff cod liver oil too heavily?

Write. Write Write.
Ned.

62 ‘The History of John Jones’ appeared in *CF* 3 (January 1923): 110.

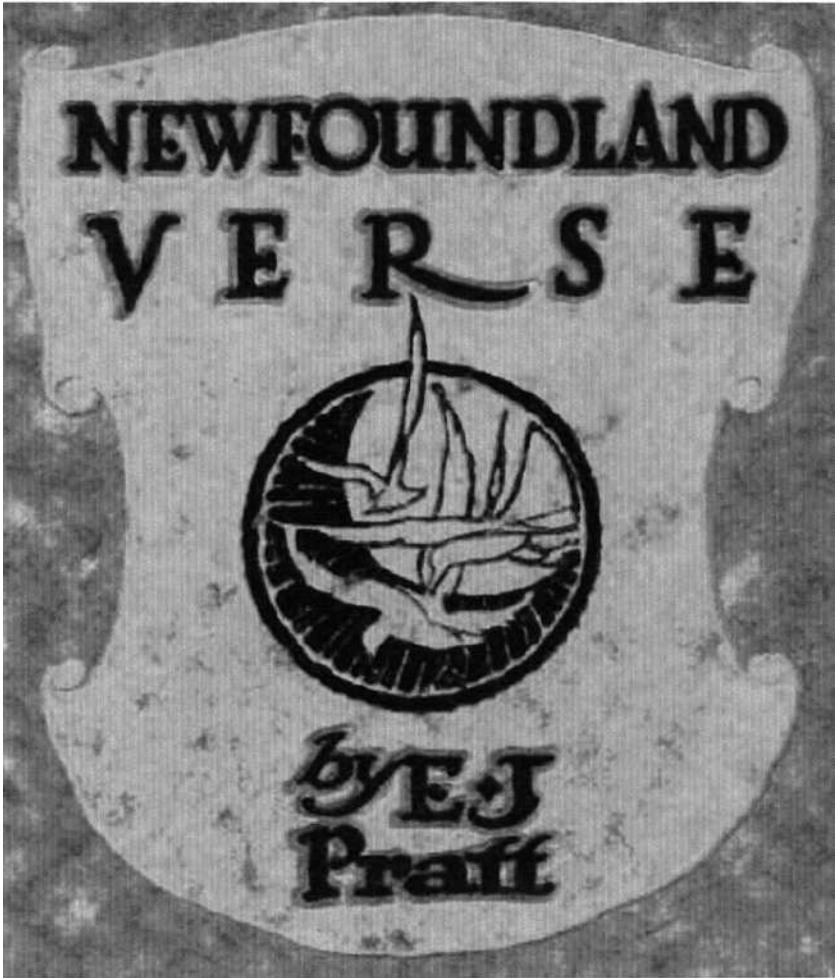
63 Pelham Edgar.

64 Another poem from *A Bobcaygeon Chapbook*. The offending lines read in full ‘She knew the thing that I knew / I should never from that bed get up.’

65 Unidentified.

66 Unidentified.

67 Phelps had sent a copy of the chapbook, and Pratt the ‘summer stuff’ alluded to in this letter, to Lorne Pierce at Ryerson Press. In Fall 1922, Pierce accepted Pratt’s first collection of poems which was published as *Newfoundland Verse* (1923).



Newfoundland Verse (Ryerson 1923) was designed by Pratt's friend Frederick Varley.

TO LORNE PIERCE⁶⁸

Victoria College

Jan. 16, 23

Dear Dr Pierce,

Mr Varley⁶⁹ tells me that he will finish those designs absolutely by the end of this week. I think he is counting upon having an interview with you to-morrow or next day. I intimated to him that I would prefer a design having the quality of spaciousness befitting ocean themes than those too closely-woven patterns with their intricacy of detail that MacDonald⁷⁰ works out though, of course, with his own peculiar finish. Varley agreed with the suggestion.

Will you let me know what negotiations you make with outside firms? I should like an English imprimatur on the volume as understood in our first interview.

In any publicity given to the book will you kindly see to it that such an ugly, stiff term as 'Professor' is absolutely excluded: first, because the title is at present technically incorrect and, secondly, the term is sufficient to stultify any poetic claims which a writer may, in all modesty, put forth. Just plain E.J. Pratt, or Mr Pratt if the formality demands it.

68 Lorne A. Pierce (1890–1961) was editor-in-chief of Ryerson Press (formerly the Methodist Book Room) from 1920 to 1960, making it one of the most productive publishing houses in Canada. An ardent literary nationalist, Pierce both encouraged and published Canadian authors, and books and pamphlets on Canadian literary, educational, and religious subjects. In 1926, he endowed a prize – the Lorne Pierce Medal – to be awarded by the Royal Society 'in annual recognition of achievement in imaginative and critical literature.' After Pierce accepted Pratt's first collection of poems, *NV*, in 1922, he and Pratt were good friends and frequent correspondents for many years.

69 Frederick H. Varley (1881–1969) came to Canada from Sheffield, England, in 1912 at the urging of Arthur Lismer, and joined the Grip design firm, where he worked with Tom Thomson. In 1920, he was a founding member of the Group of Seven. At Pratt's request, Ryerson Press engaged Varley to design the endpapers and decorations for *NV*.

70 Wilson MacDonald (1880–1967), born at Cheapside, Ontario, had made a name for himself as a poet, pen-and-ink artist, and magician. He published a dozen books of mostly romantic, traditional verse, often decorated with his own 'closely-woven' pen-and-ink drawings. In the 1920s and 1930s, he mounted frequent and extremely popular recital tours. Deacon for a time regarded him as Canada's most promising new poet, but neither Pierce nor Pratt considered him a good poet or a pleasant acquaintance.

Finally a suggestion from a friend. Look after your health and get some sleep. We don't want 'Ryerson Press' to revert to 'Wm Briggs'⁷¹ because of the early 'demise' of the new literary manager.

More power to your elbow.

Sincerely,
E.J. Pratt

TO WILLIAM ARTHUR DEACON

25 Tullis Drive⁷²

Friday noon [27 Apr. 1923]

Dear Bill,

The Review⁷³ tended to restore my collapsed heart more effectively than digitalis. What impressed me more favourably than anything else was the expression of your own critical integrity where side by side with your own valued appreciation you were not backward in stating an adverse judgment upon inferior work.

It's your intellectual candour no less than your literary insight that is making your column⁷⁴ live to-day. Put the petrol on us and apply the match when necessary. There is a lot of dead timber to be consumed. God himself has special uses for flames, and a self-complacent poet makes excellent roasting material.

Thanks Bill, anyway, old thing, for the generous space you gave the volume in your paper. It was more than I deserved.

71 As Book Steward of the Methodist Church of Canada (1879–1918), Reverend William Briggs was responsible for the Methodist Book Room press, which published under the imprint of his name. In 1919, Reverend Samuel Fallis (or Follis) succeeded him as book steward and changed the name to Ryerson Press to commemorate Egerton Ryerson, founder in 1830 of the original Methodist Press in Canada.

72 The Pratts had recently moved to a house at 25 Tullis Drive, Toronto, after having lived for two years with Viola's widowed mother in a house on Davenport Road.

73 Deacon had given *NV* a generally enthusiastic review in *Saturday Night* on 21 April 1923.

74 Besides editing the book review section in *Saturday Night* and writing many of the reviews, Deacon had a weekly column under the pen name 'Candide' entitled 'Saved from the Waste-Basket,' a potpourri of snippets from correspondence, literary gossip, and personal tidbits.

I am lying on my back in bed and may have to remain here for two more weeks – slow heart convalescence after flu.⁷⁵ But anytime you and your beloved wife feel like straying up this way for an evening chat – and let us hope it will be very soon – the door is wide open. There is still a little sherry left and a humidior for John Cotton⁷⁶ and a *great deal* of welcome.

Ned.

TO LORNE PIERCE

May 16, 23

Hello, old globe-trotter:

I called in to see you this morning but you were *not* as Job might say.⁷⁷ I trust your health has improved since our two hearts, a month ago, beat as one.⁷⁸ Mine is gradually taking on normal speech though still afflicted with sibilants.

Are you getting a little time to yourself, and could you next week run up with me for a day or two to Bobcaygeon and help me plant my Irish Cobblers?⁷⁹ Think over this question with prayer and fasting and let me know in good time.

How is Newfoundland Verse swimming? I have just received word from my brother⁸⁰ who said that S.E. Garland, a leading bookseller in St. Johns, thinks that the sale down there ought to be ‘considerable.’ I suppose the Wholesale Department is in touch with the Nfld. market.

This is what I should like to say, old thing. When the time comes for a Second Edition,⁸¹ or a first English or American Edition, I’d like to make a few small but important corrections. ‘Magnolia Blossoms’ must certainly be

75 Pratt had been ill since early April with a reputed mild ‘heart seizure’ aggravated by influenza. He remained in bed until 5 May, by which time he had fully recovered from the ‘heart attack he may never have had,’ to quote Viola Pratt, who always doubted the diagnosis.

76 A brand of pipe tobacco.

77 An allusion to Job 7:21: ‘thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.’

78 See the letters to Pierce, 16 April 1923 (*EJP: Web*) and William Deacon, 27 April (pp. 21–2).

Pierce’s heart condition had indisposed him for several weeks concurrently with Pratt’s reputed ‘heart seizure.’

79 Potatoes.

80 Calvert C. Pratt (1888–1963), the youngest of Pratt’s surviving brothers was a prominent St John’s businessman, president or director of a number of commercial firms and widely known for his philanthropy. He was named to the Canadian Senate in 1951.

81 There was no second edition of *NV*.

integrated.⁸² ‘Newfoundland’ must have its last stanza spatially articulated to the body of the poem. Two or three mis-spellings and some punctuations must be corrected. Wherever the errors are due to my oversight in proof, I shall gladly put up the coin.

And now apart from business, are you going to take a good holiday this summer? I do not like the idea of your spending the vacation in dusty New York archives. Your stimulating articles in the ‘Christian Guardian’⁸³ do not need any extra polish from undue research, and remember the medical definition of a ‘pericardium.’ ‘The pericardium is a very *thin*, if elastic, membrane surrounding the heart and enclosing a liquor which prevents the surface of the heart from becoming *dry* by its continual motion.’

Verb. Sap.⁸⁴ (no slang implications in the latter word)

Pratt.

TO LORNE PIERCE

Wednesday p.m. [23 May 1923]

My beloved Mephisto,⁸⁵

If *prospects* be realised we shall hold our Saturnalia in the back-yards of the Allobroges⁸⁶ at – I hope – a no very far distant date. Thanks for your most kindly remarks in the Guardian this week.⁸⁷

82 ‘Magnolia Blossoms’ (NV, 18–19; *EJP*: CP 1.69) consisted of a pair of sonnets, the second of which had been divided into two distinct parts in the volume.

83 A weekly newspaper of the Methodist Church of Canada, published by the Methodist Book Room (and later Ryerson Press).

84 *Verbum sat sapienti (est)*: ‘a word to the wise is sufficient.’ Pierce, replying to Pratt’s letter on 21 May, responded:

I had been expecting you for a long time to confessional. I suppose your long spell of prayer and fasting has left you with little of the taint of sin to confess about.

The Wholesale advise me that ‘Newfoundland Verse’ has excellent prospects – the ‘pro’ meaning ‘on ahead.’ Don’t book your passage for Tahiti before you learn just how you stand, not in spectral sovereigns but in actual dollars ...

The reviews are all salubrious, both east and west, and that’s something. If you do not get a lift toward the Chancellorship because of this it will have been a miscarriage of justice.

85 Mephistopheles. Pratt had been reading Goethe’s *Faust*, which influenced his writing of ‘The Witches’ Brew’ in the summer of 1923.

86 An ancient Celtic tribe inhabiting what is now Dauphine and Savoy and remembered chiefly for their saturnalian rites. Pratt refers to himself and Phelps as members of that tribe.

87 Pierce had reviewed NV in the *Christian Guardian*, 23 May 1923, 22.

I am enclosing the corrections referred to in my last letter.⁸⁸ Some or most of them *may* be due to mine own omissions in reading proof. Wherever that is the case I shall gladly abide by contract. I am also inserting in brackets an explanatory dedication under the title of the sonnets 'Magnolia Blossoms.' Edgar⁸⁹ who is very fond of this poem suggested some addition, on the ground of the 'subtlety of the lines.' I am inserting ('To a Certain Magdalen).

Yours fraternally,
Faust.

Corrigenda.

- 1) Page 14 *has* for *hast* in 'Majestically *hast* cast'
- 2) Page 18 Magnolia Blossoms
 - (a) ('To a Certain Magdalen)
 - (b) *ironic* for *irenic*
- Page 19 (c) omit III before last six lines
- 3) Page 39 omit period after depart 'ere I depart.'
- 4) " 89 Bring forward one-half of the last section on page 90 to page 89 as the poem looks now as if it ended with the line 'guard too well.'
- 5) " 103 omit ; after the line 'on the frozen air' and omit accent over e in formed.
- 6) 114 *blenching* for *blending* in the line 'which, blending as of night's austerity.'
- 7) 134 *sips* for *sits* in line 'where sits the lily of the morning dew.'
- 8)⁹⁰ 74 *of a* for *in* in line
might cool this hell *in* Paradise
- 9) 105 Before an altar on one page.
- 10) 71 New paragraph with 'His mates had never heard'

TO LORNE PIERCE

Thursday am. [24 May 1923]

88 Since *NV* was not reissued, his full page of 'Corrigenda' was never used. Corrections were made, however, in the poems selected from the book for inclusion in *CP1* and *CP2*.

89 Pelham Edgar.

90 Pratt initialled the page opposite the eighth point in his list of corrections.

Dr Lorne Pierce

Ryerson Press.

Say old thing,

I forgot to mention in my letter of yesterday that my job of correcting proof ceased with the galleys that morning when Wilson MacDonald came into your office. I didn't see any page proofs at all. I assumed that the hurry of printing in order to get the books into the stores by Easter made it impossible to get final revision done.

But don't do any unnecessary worrying about the matter.

Yours
E.J. Pratt.

Excuse pencil. Have lost pen.

P.

TO WILLIAM ARTHUR DEACON

Bobcaygeon, Ont.

June 19, 1923

My Dear Bill,

There must be telepathic affinities between us. I was on the point of writing you when your missive arrived. I have since opened up communications with the President of the Immortals⁹¹ inquiring why procrastination, that human failing, should also be present in the Councils of the Gods. Have not yet had a reply but certain vibrations intimate to me that Juno and Hebe are both plucking at the beard of Jove.⁹² Well, here's hoping, old dog, that all your wishes concerning weight, health, and gender may soon be realised. Vi is sending along a little token for good luck. Let us know developments.

⁹¹ Thomas Hardy's description of Fate, or 'the Power that rules our destinies,' in his novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

⁹² In Roman mythology, Juno was the wife of Jove or Jupiter; Hebe was their daughter and the cup-bearer to Jove. Pratt refers to the expected birth of the Deacons' first child, a son who was named William Herbert.

We were fearing, after we left your place that night, that the baby carriage would be in a rather musty condition not having been attended to for over a year. As long as you can make it snug there will be some good long sleep in it.

With regard to Moore,⁹³ since reading your letter, the atmosphere of the cottage has been sulphurous. *Sacré bleu! Sapristi! Ciel!*⁹⁴ Damnation without Redemption! That fellow would alter the Codex Bezae⁹⁵ if he happened to get hold of it, on the ground of archaic lettering. I am glad the Authorized Version happened to be complete before he was born and that Hebrew vowel points were constructed before anyone thought of asking the cooperation of E.J.M. Verdammit! Did you ever read in cold print of such presumption. Not satisfied with altering Petrarchan sonnet forms he must unearth the bones of sacred Herrick;⁹⁶ change constructions, punctuation! He knows as much about style as a second engineer in a Kansas elevator. Pierce is away just now, I understand, but before he left he wrote me – in answer to a letter in which I protested against any fifth-rate amanuensis tinkering with my stuff – that he was going to make a rigid investigation into the various responsibilities of the house. Since the Varley episode⁹⁷ he could bite off a six-inch spike. Moore evidently is so sore over the readjustments of a couple of years ago⁹⁸ that the only way he can release his feelings is by chewing up other people's manuscripts.

Well Bill, if you and Mrs Deacon can manage to run up any time during the summer there is a bedroom, lots of fresh air and lots of welcome. Week ends or whole weeks as often as you can manage it. Thanks ever so much for your inclusion of Newfoundland Verse in the list of holiday books.

Vi sends love to Mrs Deacon in which of course I join.

Ned

93 E.J. Moore was advertising manager at Ryerson Press. He also did some editorial work, and Deacon had accused him of making unauthorized changes in the text of his book *Pens and Pirates*, then in press. Pratt now suspected that Moore had been responsible for the errors and alterations that had crept into *NV*.

94 Mild expletives in French: roughly translated, 'Holy Mary! For God's sake! Heavens!'

95 A fifth-century Graeco-Latin manuscript of the four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.

96 A poem by the seventeenth-century English poet Robert Herrick, quoted by Deacon in his book, had been mutilated in transcription, and Moore had been blamed. In his letter of 21 June, Deacon wrote to Pratt: 'I am getting along splendidly with Moore, who is not a bad fellow at heart, when you go at him easy. He swears that he did not make the alterations but that a new proof-reader did. He is having it all put back for me as it was in the beginning.'

97 Frederick Varley's designs for the endpapers of *NV* had been printed with light brown ink on beige paper and did not appear to good effect. Pierce, Varley, and Pratt were very annoyed by the mistake, and Moore was blamed, at least by Pratt.

98 In 1920, when Ryerson Press was reorganized, Lorne Pierce became editor-in-chief.

TO LORNE PIERCE

Friday [23 Nov. 1923]

Hello, old thing,

I had my mind made up a dozen times, I suppose, to drop you a line during the last month, but somehow or other the thousand and one duties intervened. I wanted to write, all the more, because I thought you were upset over a conversation which Deacon, Cornell⁹⁹ and I had with the chief. As Deacon possibly informed you it was the first intention to go to you direct but some friend of his advised him to go to Fallis¹⁰⁰ as you would probably veto any action being taken to the chief. Deacon and Cornell asked me to go along and also Wallace¹⁰¹ as we belonged to the younger group that the Ryersons were encouraging. We were divided between solicitude for you and mistrust of some one else before we came to a decision. We explained to F.¹⁰² that you were utterly ignorant of our action, that we had every confidence in F. and yourself, in your policies, in your soundness of motive, in your outlook generally but we felt that apathy if not antagonism from a certain quarter was neutralising your efforts. At the time I had no special grievance, as I told F., beyond the fact that I knew our whole group was being blocked by adverse criticisms. Certain positively impudent remarks which M.¹⁰³ had made to Cornell as well as the prolonged delay in getting 'Lantern Marsh' on the market were specially mentioned and F. expressed in no uncertain terms his opinion of M's doings. He gave you highest appreciation, admired your writing and your point of view and promised to keep his eyes open for untoward developments. Perhaps our action was ill-advised. We would not have done anything to give you anxiety or increase your cares but if we were going to meet with continuous opposition from the (as far as we are concerned) most critical part of the whole machinery – the Advertising and Publicity

99 Beaumont S. Cornell (1892–1958) was a medical researcher, a colleague of Frederick Banting, as well as an author. Ryerson Press had recently published his second novel, *Lantern Marsh* (1923).

100 The 'chief' was Reverend Samuel Fallis, managing director of Ryerson Press. Pierce wrote in his diary on 15 October 1923, 'I was chagrined the other day when E.J. Pratt, Beaumont Cornell and W.A. Deacon all lined up and called on Dr. Fallis to complain about the sale of their books. I suppose no three men have had more done for them.'

101 Paul A.W. Wallace had published *The Twist and Other Stories* with Ryerson in 1923.

102 Samuel Fallis.

103 E.J. Moore. See the letter to Deacon, 19 June 1923 (p. 26).

Department – then we were going to govern our future contacts accordingly. I realise you have done your d–est for us and I am grateful for the enthusiastic encouragement you have given ‘Newfoundland Verse.’ But I should like to know why M. has consistently ignored that volume in his otherwise exhaustive list of new publications. I was not mentioned in the successive issues of the Canadian Bookman or the Canadian Magazine, the Saturday Night, or any place outside of the ‘Guardian’ where the special reference to the volume by *outside* writers gave all the publicity there that it needed. I have always noted your unfailing interest in it and you have given it, in your ‘Corner,’¹⁰⁴ many very appreciative references, but in the general literary magazines and periodicals it was ignored and that fact was pointed out to me many times by my friends. ‘If the Ryerson Press published your work, then at least they might [...] advertise it.’ ‘In a list which apparently aims to be inclusive why isn’t Newfoundland Verse mentioned?’

The only thing I want to know, old chap, is – Do you candidly think that personal prejudices are working against us? You need not commit yourself if you do not want to, but all of us think that that fat-head in the East of the building is out ‘to get us’ by inertia if not by positive obstruction.

Well now I have got that off my chest and that’s all I shall say except to reiterate my confidence in you and my admiration for your own work.

I have a poem finished¹⁰⁵ in which you might be interested. Both Edgar and Hooke¹⁰⁶ of Victoria think it is unquestionably the best single thing I have done and are very confident as to its selling qualities. It would make a little volume of about fifty pages. If you would care to see it I will send it along at once.

Pardon this outburst and will you burn the screed when read.

Ned Pratt.

104 The book column which Pierce wrote in the *Christian Guardian*.

105 ‘The Witches’ Brew.’

106 Samuel H. Hooke (1874–1968) had come to Victoria College in 1913 as associate professor of Oriental languages and literatures. He also taught modern history and was a founder of the university magazine *The Rebel* (1917–20), which had evolved into *Canadian Forum*.

TO LORNE PIERCE

Dec. 1/1923

Dear old thing,

Your letter¹⁰⁷ with its manliness and straight-forwardness came into my paws a few minutes ago. It has confirmed the impressions I have always had of your Highness. I note with much gratification the prospect of having you and your family as neighbours in the near future.

With regard to Newfoundland Verse I have learned of the prominence you gave it in the recent Exhibits¹⁰⁸ and I believe that the demand even if it does not partake of the character of sky-rocketing is steady and growing. Since I saw you last I have received many personal letters of warm appreciation – urging further literary activity – from prominent critics, notably Morgan-Powell¹⁰⁹ and Bernard McEvoy¹¹⁰ of the Vancouver Daily Province.

The main thing I want to consult you about is this: – I referred in my last note to a new poem which I have recently finished. Its subject and treatment are entirely new – ‘The Witches’ Brew or the Immortals’ Night Off,’ in tetrameters with prose insets. In a day or two as soon as I can get a typed copy – I shall submit it to you.

There are a few points I should like to raise.

I should like it to be tried out upon one or two American and English Publishers first – firms of a more aggressive character that take hold of young men. If they undertake to publish it then the Ryerson Press, if it so desired, could handle it for Canadians. I am not particularly anxious for Canadian publication alone for reasons I will state later. I can understand the difficulties in getting my first volume upon a foreign market. An American publisher naturally likes to

107 On 29 November, Pierce had replied to Pratt’s letter of 23 November (pp. 27–8), defending his firm and its policies, and appearing to take no offence from the actions of the three authors. He expressed an interest in Pratt’s new poem, about which he had heard ‘from several quarters.’

108 Pierce had reported that *NV* had been given ‘prominence’ at ‘Libraries and Retail Stores’ during the recent Canadian Book Week. (See the letter of 23 November [p. 28].)

109 Samuel Morgan-Powell (1867–1962) was for many years literary editor of the *Montreal Star*. He reviewed *NV* for the *Star* (5 May 1923, 15). He was a devotee of Pratt’s poetry and a casual friend. Pratt wrote a foreword to a book of his verse, *Down the Years* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1938).

110 McEvoy (1842–1932) had worked ten years for the Toronto *Mail and Empire* before moving to the Vancouver *Daily Province*. He published several books of verse, but is best known for *From the Great Lakes to the Wide West* (Toronto: Briggs, 1902).

see a prospective Canadian volume justify itself in its homeland by review and sale before taking risks, and perhaps when a fair circulation has been reached here, – possibly a second edition, – the foreign market may lose some of its tightness and fear. However, Newfoundland Verse in actual print together with review clippings and account of sales might be sent as bona fide ‘collateral’ to authenticate the ‘Witches’ Brew.’ A certain publisher from abroad staying over in Toronto as a guest of Pelham Edgar was shown the manuscript by Edgar and was convinced of its value and tentatively suggested that it might be open for negotiation. I did not act on the suggestion as I felt the importance of my own contact with you and your generous treatment of my first volume and your greatly appreciated belief in my humble self. Edgar, Hooke, Kennedy,¹¹¹ Phelps and others think it is the best, at least the most vital single thing I have done, certainly the most original. A few of the more conservative men felt a little dubious about the theme, – whether some controversy might not arise from it, but all agree as to impact and grip.

Professor Alexander¹¹² is having an evening at his home next week, where I am to present it to the staff and a few outside picked University men interested in poetry, some of whom have already seen it.

Now I know your own progressive and almost radical outlook on life and literature and I do not feel any hesitation on that score, but I want you to tell me if the Ryerson Press might feel any qualms about its publication, or whether the Canadian Constituency would be interested in it. I may be raising questions without any basis whatsoever. The poem has been ‘tried out’ on a half-dozen of the Vic staff and they entered whole-heartedly into the mood of it and were willing to back it.

But in any case, if you feel disposed – you might try to make some outside contacts first as a ‘try-out.’ All who have seen it suggest fantastic decoration or illustration in harmony with the framework of witchcraft in which the theme is set. It might be a work of above fifty pages which could easily sell for one dollar but I think illustration would be very desirable. I will send the manuscript along in a day or two.

With the best of good luck
Ned Pratt

111 William P.M. Kennedy (1879–1963), associate professor of modern history at the University of Toronto, and later professor of law and dean of the Toronto School of Law, was the author of numerous works on constitutional, industrial, and social law.

112 Browning scholar William John Alexander (1855–1944) was professor and head of the Department of English Literature at University College, Toronto from 1889 to 1926.

TO LORNE PIERCE

April 5, 1924

Hello, old Lucifer,

Your note received. Thanks very much for your efforts to place ‘The Witches Brew.’¹¹³ I suppose, after all, publishers are the best judges of the market, and perhaps I had better keep the poem on the shelf until I publish my next volume when I may include it at the end. Edgar is so confident about it that he has sent it off to Constable, England.¹¹⁴ I understand though, that the bottom has fallen out of the world market for books, so, I can only wait.

I suppose ‘Newfoundland Verse’ may get in England as soon as it enters upon a Second Edition here. There was a good reference to it in ‘The British Weekly’ in February, in a literary survey of modern poetry. It is a pity that it couldn’t be placed in some way or other on the British stalls just for a try out. At least, it would have the chance of being reviewed in the English magazines over there. I know that you are doing your damnest any way. I expect to get across to England this coming summer if the banks are merciful.

Hope you are keeping well, and that the world, the flesh and their boon companion are not pursuing you too persistently. Will be in to see you next week.

Yours sincerely,
E.J. Pratt.

TO LORNE PIERCE

April 12, 24

Once again, old thing,

A delightful little tidbit came into my hands a few days ago which it would be selfish to keep to my self, so I am passing it on to you. It concerns our mutual

113 Having read ‘The Witches’ Brew,’ Pierce decided that publishing a poem with its alcoholic elements was too great a risk for Ryerson Press with its close ties to the Methodist Church. He agreed to try to ‘place’ it with other firms, primarily in the United States, but was unsuccessful. (See the letter to Pierce, 1 December 1923 [p. 30].)

114 Constable and Company, a British publishing house.

friend Wilson MacDonald and Pelham Edgar. Pelham came in to my office last Thursday with a letter in his hands from W.M. – a most abusive letter in which the said W.M. asserted that when he gets back to the Queen City there is going to be war to the death between himself and the dignified Professor of English Literature of Victoria College. Edgar said to me, ‘Why Pratt, I do not even know the *names* of the people he is talking about or *what* he is talking about. It is enough by half to commit the fellow to a lunatic asylum.’ The names of Bothwell,¹¹⁵ Salverson,¹¹⁶ were repeated often, and MacDonald claimed that if Edgar said one word of commendation about such a disreputable brood then MacDonald would open his seventeen inch batteries when he got back. ‘Do you know what they are saying about you out here?’ he asks Edgar. ‘They hate you Edgar, they call you a fop, a nobody, a - - - - -.’ He blames Bothwell for a dirty prank that he played on him a little while ago. Bothwell knew MacDonald for a vegetarian yet ordered a beefsteak for him at a dinner in his honour. And several of the ‘literary lights’ out West refuse to recognize him as equal to Shelley or Keats. Edgar adds ‘The name Shakespeare is just as easy to pronounce as Shelley ... Why does not the damn fool bring in the Almighty as well?’ Edgar did not know whether to laugh or swear when he read the letter. MacDonald is going to shake the dust of Canada off his feet, a nation of *ingrates* & ! ? : “ ! ! Edgar is getting heartily sick of him.

Well, I shall try to get on to see you next week some time. I met Locke¹¹⁷ yesterday and he showed me his Catalogue of Canadian books which is going to be placed in Exhibit in England this summer.¹¹⁸ I appreciated his inclusion of N.V. especially when the poetic section had to be limited. Are there any arrangements for an English supply at publishing firms or book stores in case of a demand, however slight, resulting from the Exhibit. I expect to be in England myself about the first of June. Do you think there is any chance of my being able

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- 115 Austin McPhail Bothwell (1885–1928), the first Rhodes Scholar from Saskatchewan, was editor of the *Bulletin* of the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Alliance. He had taught German at Wesley College in Winnipeg and, after the First World War, English literature at Central College Institute in Regina.
- 116 Laura Goodman Salverson (1890–1970), a protégée of Austin Bothwell, had just published her first novel *The Viking Heart* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1923), based on the experiences of Icelandic pioneers in Manitoba. Her six subsequent novels were less successful, but her autobiography, *Confessions of an Immigrant’s Daughter* (Toronto: Ryerson; London: Faber and Faber, 1939), is one of the best Canadian examples of the genre.
- 117 George H. Locke (1870–1937), long-time chief librarian of Toronto Public Libraries, was the author of several works on Canadian history and a founding member of the Canadian Authors Association.
- 118 An exhibition of books from around the British Empire at the 1924 Wembley Exhibition.

to give a few readings in clubs or Churches? I should like to be able to introduce it if the avenues were open. I thought of asking Dr Trevor Davies¹¹⁹ to give me a note of introduction to some of his overseas friends. What do you think? I trust that your old heart is pounding more rhythmically now-a-days. Are you going to have a few holidays this summer?

Yours till the last wave breaks
Ned

P.S. I have a faint suspicion that you might regard this haphazard and inconsequential effusion as in the mad category as well.

TO VIOLA PRATT

Friday 8 pm. [23 May 1924]¹²⁰

Well, old darling,

We have just passed under the Quebec Bridge and finished a most marvellous dinner. The four of us¹²¹ sit together and we have an Immense time – the weather is perfect. We spend hours on deck walking around, cultivating an appetite and the roast beef & capons disappear like magic. The steamer is very comfortable even luxurious, just suits my tastes. I am feeling tip-top only a bit lonesome for yourself & Clare. What kind of a time did you have today? Did Art & Lal¹²² stay over? I hope you have a real good time with lots of leisure on your hands. Take care of yourself and don't be afraid to spend a bit of gink¹²³ once in a while to keep the days humping.

119 Born (1871) in Wales, Davies was superintendent minister of Timothy Eaton Memorial Methodist Church, Toronto.

120 On board the *Montclare*, the Canadian Pacific liner on which Pratt was travelling to England.

121 Making the voyage with him were R.S. ('Bobby') Knox (1887–1975) and Herbert Davis (1893–1967), both in the Department of English at University College, Toronto, and both British-born. Knox remained at University College until his retirement, but Davis moved to Cornell University as head of the Department of English, and later to Smith College in Massachusetts, where he was president. Davis was accompanied by his wife, making up 'the four of us.'

122 Arthur and Lila Phelps.

123 Money; loose change.

Just now I am writing this in the smoking room. Bobbie is out in the next room writing to Freda¹²⁴ who sent a great? basket of the richest fruit on board grapes & black cherries etc. etc. We – that is the four of us – have to go in to Davis' Cabin to *eat* at nine o'clock. Just imagine. It is now eight p.m. and dinner just over. However, between appetites and pills no jaundice is likely to happen.

Bobbie catches me hold by the arm and promenades with me around the deck speaking in the most endearing terms. I can't solve the riddle exactly as the old rapprochement of which we have spoken so often is not nearly as intimate as we considered it. Bobbie's procrastination has very much weakened the tie on the other side. I understand from Davis that things might have been different a year ago *if things had been different*, as Irish as that remark may be.

Well in about an hour or two the Montclare will be in Rimouski and this letter will be returning to you Westward. No land before getting into Liverpool. Weather conditions are excellent and the prospect is ideal.

Well old sweetheart give yourself and Claire a dozen hugs for me. Tell Claire Daddy is gone to England to get her a doll's carriage and will be back by & bye.

Love
Ned.

TO VIOLA PRATT

Liverpool,
Melville Chambers
50a Lord Street

Thursday 5 [June 1924]

Dearest Vi,

Well, it is just ten o'clock and I have finished breakfast. Knox has left his brother's place in the suburbs of Liverpool and gone to up to Aberdeen for a rather extended visit to his own home. Olmstead¹²⁵ arrived two days ago, stayed with us a day and now is gone to Wales to recuperate after a very sea-sickly voyage. He lost eight pounds in as many days, poor chap. To-morrow I intend going up to Durham and Barnard Castle¹²⁶ spending a few days there before proceeding

124 Freda Maud Woodman, whom Knox married in 1926.

125 Unidentified.

126 A town on the Durham side of the River Tees; the birthplace of Pratt's father, the Reverend John Pratt (1839–1904).

North to Aberdeen to spend a time with Knox. Knox, Olmstead and I will probably go to Alyth where Knox's brother-in-law has a country cottage mid agisting¹²⁷ sheaves and grouse preserves. I am to collect sufficient [...] for supplies and to cook the grub.

That's as far as my plans extend for the present.

I spent an hour or so yesterday in the Liverpool Art Gallery, saw the originals of two of our pictures, Hope and Dante & Beatrice,¹²⁸ in fact a third too, the one in the dining room of the death of Beatrice.¹²⁹

At night Knox and Mrs Cumming his sister, Art, Maud and I went at the invitation of Knox to the Theatre where we saw Zack a play by Brighouse,¹³⁰ a comedy which you must see if it ever comes to Toronto – Brighouse is the author of *Hobson's Choice*. It's too bad we missed that – they say it's worth making an effort to see.

Liverpool is a comparatively uninteresting city – quite industrial and I am anxious to get away. I should like to go hike Wales for a few days, but I think I'll defer that till I come back from the North. Knox says I must go to Chester which is only twelve miles from [*missing page*]

I have been wondering just how you have been getting along these last two weeks, you two old chumps. Did the Browns¹³¹ get in to the house all right? and are the examination results out yet? Tell me all the news old dearie, and when I get up to Durham I'll drop you all the information and instruction necessary for the good of your soul, & I'll send some picture cards to Clare.

Love,
Ned.

127 A misuse of the word, which refers to 'the taking in to pasture' of livestock (*OED*).

128 'Hope' is unidentified; 'Dante and Beatrice' is probably Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The Meeting of Dante and Beatrice in Paradise* (1852, watercolour).

129 Probably Rossetti's *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (1853–4, watercolour).

130 Harold Brighouse (1882–1958), born and educated in Manchester, England; the author of some seventy plays between 1909 and 1952, including *Hobson's Choice* and *Zack*.

131 During Pratt's absence, Viola and Claire were staying with Viola's mother at 889 Davenport Road, and 25 Tullis Drive was rented to the Brown family.

TO VIOLA PRATT

June 10, 1924

Dearest Vi,

I have just finished dinner at the above-named hotel.¹³² It is now half-past eight and I am a bit sleepy and tired after a very long walk. The last two or three days since coming here have been somewhat full of incidents. As soon as I arrived I looked up a man whose name was Pratt, the only person in this little town of 4000 who possessed that name. He was no relative at all but he gave me the name of a man here – Sunter, who he claimed knew all the old inhabitants. As soon as I told Sunter who I was, he almost fell upon my neck, crying out – ‘Are you actually Johnny Pratt’s son?’ He took me into his house and told me that my father and all the Pratt kin had removed to a little village called Gunnerside about seventeen miles from Barnard Castle, and he doubted whether any of them might be found there as the old folks were dead and the young ones had moved out. However, yesterday morning I started off at 9 a.m. to walk over the beautiful hills and dales to Gunnerside. It took me until 5 pm. to reach the place all tuckered out, but all the inhabitants made a great fuss over me when I disclosed my identity. They took me to the house where he was brought up, a house made of stone, (in fact all of the houses here are made of stone) and over one hundred & fifty years old. I met Miss Coates, a lady of more than 80 yrs who knew not only my dad but his dad, James Pratt. She was a sister of Calvert Coates, Father’s friend and name sake of Cal. I went inside of the Church where dad used to hold forth, visited the cemetery where the Pratts for generations were buried, chatted to several indigenous nonagenarians and did all kinds of queer stunts, getting back to Barnard Castle about an hour or so ago. I will not walk that distance any more. Five miles a day is enough for me after this. I will remain here another day and if I get word from Knox to go up north I will go for a week.

Living has not been very costly so far. I am keeping well within my allowance per diem. I suppose later on in the summer when I get down to Wembley¹³³ the expenditure will go a little higher.

132 The King’s Head Hotel, Barnard Castle.

133 NV was to be included in a display of Canadian books at the Wembley Exhibition. (See the letter to Lorne Pierce, 12 April 1924 [pp. 32–3].)

This last week I have been feeling about as lonely as that Zanzibar cat on the top of the parapet before he sprang into the Pacific.¹³⁴ I wish you could come across in an aeroplane in twenty-four hours. I begin already to look forward to the time passing to board the *Montcalm*.¹³⁵

Next week if I do not go north I shall take a visit to the Lake District. I want to get to the Yorkshire Coast sometime as well. This Yorkshire county, especially these dales are so beautiful that they cannot be described. I never beheld any village more charming in its situation as Gunnerside.

On the way over today I plucked one leaf of holly, one forget-me-not and one blue-bell, and am enclosing them in this letter. They will be pretty badly crushed when you get them but you may be at least able to identify them. The forget-me-not is for Kaky, a little reminder of her doll's carriage when I get across. The rest you can put away with other things that I will send from time to time.

I notice by your letter that you corrected the proof.¹³⁶ Thanks very much. Keep a copy of the magazine when you get it. You may get an additional copy, for me from Billy Little when you see him. Send me the Examination results, or I suppose by this time, they have been forwarded. Address all mail to Art as you did your first letter.¹³⁷ It is safest and Art can forward it on wherever I am.

Well old sweetheart, have a good time, and be good to yourself. Claire's head drawn by Daddie.¹³⁸

lovingly
Ned.

134 'Tom the cat from Zanzibar' in Pratt's 'The Witches' Brew':

And so this wild-cat, now bereft

Of all of life's amenities,

Took one blood-curdling leap and left

Magellan's for the vacant seas.

(ll. 555–8)

135 Pratt frequently misidentified the *Montclare*, the Canadian Pacific liner on which he travelled, calling it variously the *Montcalm*, the *Montfort*, and the *Montrose*.

136 Of an essay, 'Thomas Hardy', which Pratt published in the *Canadian Journal of Religious Thought* 1 (May-June 1924): 239–47.

137 The word 'second' has been scored out.

138 A crude drawing of a head and arms appears here in the text.

 TO VIOLA PRATT

June 22, 1924

My dearest Vi

I wrote you last from Alyth¹³⁹ on my way back from Glenisla (the county home of Knox's brother-in-law).

Olmstead, Knox and I arrived at Glasgow the day before yesterday. Olmie went on to Edinburgh to spend a couple of days before proceeding to Europe; Knox stayed at Glasgow with his brother and I left immediately for Ayr to spend a day looking up the monuments and memorials of Burns. Ayr is a town of good size about one hour's run from Glasgow. I immediately went out to Alloway, three miles away and 'ransacked' the Cottage in which Burns was born, and the museum attached. The cottage is still the same, thatched, and the rooms, kitchen, 'ben,'¹⁴⁰ barn and bedroom have been preserved with all the relics that the curators have been able to assemble. His bed where he was born, the old clock, dish platter, spinning wheel, etc. etc. in the cottage, and practically all of his manuscript poems and letters in the adjoining museum. They were all open beneath glass cases. There was the big ha' bible¹⁴¹ owned by his father and registering the births of the family, Robert's name first. Most interesting. A little farther on was the brig of Doon, and the statue and monument of Burns in a well-cared for garden overlooking the Doon. I spent two days there moping about by myself, saw the grave of Wm Burns, Robert's father. Burns himself is buried in Dunfries. It seems that Ayr *just* keeps itself going by tourists visiting the place. When the visit was over I had a game of golf on the Ayr links, so you see I am keeping myself fairly well in trim for next fall.

The next trip I made was one day's sail down the Clyde to Rothesay and Dunoon,¹⁴² – two islands. It took me the day and I arrived back at Glasgow by 8 pm. and here I am writing the old girl.

139 Alyth is a small town in Perthshire, Scotland; Glenisla is 15 kilometres north of Alyth in County Angus.

140 An inner room or parlour (Scots dialect).

141 'The great Bible that lay in the *ha'* or principal apartment' (*OED*).

142 Rothesay is in County Bute, and Dunoon in County Argyll; both are on the west side of the Firth of Clyde.

To-morrow I go to Edinburgh for two days. I meet Knox there who will show me around, will visit the castle, Melrose and Abbotsford,¹⁴³ the Scottish National Gallery in the city and then probably I will go back to Liverpool for a few days while the world contest in golf¹⁴⁴ is being held. I would like to see it.

My money is holding out pretty well, having lived so far well within my contemplated expenditure.

Davis is still in Germany. Mrs D., poor woman, came out of the trip worse, the lung has opened again, and there is no chance of her coming back to Toronto. The doctor says it will mean a straight year and a half to get her right again if at all. Davis may not come back either if she is no better. Hard luck isn't it? Possibly my trip with him to the South of England is off on account of it.

If I go to Liverpool in a few days I shall stay there for a very short time. I would like to get my Wales trip in soon and it would be more convenient for me to take it from that close centre. I have not yet been through the Lake District, leaving that for the first part of July. Nor have I been to London. Perhaps later in the summer will be best for there.

I was glad to get your letter of June 2nd, enclosing your excerpts. I suppose by this time you have received the Committee's cheque. How are you off for funds. See Mac¹⁴⁵ if you are short. He can let you have a hundred dollars. I hope Burnette¹⁴⁶ sent you the cheque instead of to me. I will not need it, at least according to present prospects. How are the Browns¹⁴⁷?

I have not heard anything further about Floss's¹⁴⁸ coming to England. I hope she hasn't got cold feet on it. Art¹⁴⁹ is expecting her and will be greatly disappointed if she doesn't take the trip.

I suppose by this time you will have received about a dozen letters and post-cards etc. from your humble servant. I am giving you a daily account of my Iliad so you can see my geographical movements. I have decided though most

143 Melrose is a medieval Cistercian gothic abbey 60 kilometres southeast of Edinburgh, the reputed burial place of the heart of Robert the Bruce; Abbotsford is a mansion on the Tweed 5 kilometres west of Melrose, the home of Sir Walter Scott from 1812 until his death in 1832.

144 The British Open.

145 Newfoundland-born Mac Burden, Pratt's lawyer.

146 Unidentified.

147 The Browns were renting 25 Tullis Drive while Pratt was in England.

148 'Floss' or 'Poss' was Florence Sophia Pratt (1892–1984), one of Pratt's three sisters. She never married and at the time was living with her mother in St John's. She lived most of her adult life in Toronto.

149 Arthur Milligan (Art) Pratt (1886–1961), E.J. Pratt's brother. In 1924, he lived with his new wife, Maud, in Liverpool, where he was in business. Pratt made their home his headquarters during his visit to Britain.

emphatically that I will not take any extended trip again without your Majesty and the little Princess. It is too gol darned lonely without you. However, we will have a great time next September. I sent Claire a postcard yesterday. I hope she got it all right. Her letter to me was splendid Hindustani. I can imagine her sitting up at the table drawing those marks, bless her little neckie.

Well it is now ten Lal, etc. etc. an o'clock or after and I must hie off to bed. Best regards to your mother, Mr & Mrs Powell, Leila, John, Art, Lal¹⁵⁰ and much love to yourself.

Ned

TO VIOLA PRATT

Melville Chambers
50 a Lord St.
Liverpool Eng.

Sunday June 29 [1924].

Dearest Vi,

Here I am back in Liverpool after being three weeks away in the North. I spent two days in Edinburgh after returning from Ayr and met Knox again, Olmstead having gone to the Continent. I never visited a more beautiful city in my life than Edinburgh. It is built on or around seven hills like Rome. As soon as I arrived there I went to Holyrood and Edinburgh Castles, visited the famous Banqueting Hall of the Scottish Kings, saw the Crown jewels, – the Crown, the Sceptres, and Stones possessed by the kings for many centuries back. Queen Margaret's Chapel stood almost intact, a thousand years old nearly. A gun that was forged in the fourteenth century was mounted on the top with a great hole in it caused by an explosion in a battle circa 1500. At another side of the parapet was fired the one o'clock gun, keeping up an ancient practice. Close at hand was an iron crate many centuries old used for signal fires. The last one was lit in 1805 on the expectation of an invasion from Napoleon. The red guide raced through his explanation with great self-assurance and dignity. In the afternoon I took a char-a-banc¹⁵¹ trip down to the Ford Bridge. This is the largest bridge

150 The Powells are unidentified; Leila and J.D. (John) Robins (1884–1952), a colleague in the Department of English at Victoria College; Arthur and Lal Phelps.

151 Motor coach.