

**“Yours, my old and rare”:
Kendrick Smithyman’s Letters to Graham Perkins, 1942-45¹**

Edited and with notes by Peter Simpson²
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¹ I am grateful to Margaret Edgcumbe, Kendrick Smithyman’s widow and literary executor, and Graham Perkins for kind permission to reproduce these letters; thanks also to Margaret Edgcumbe for valuable assistance with identifying people and places mentioned in the letters and for other information incorporated in the notes. Kendrick Smithyman (hereafter KS) normally omitted apostrophes, a practice followed here. Any changes to the original letters are included in square brackets, though obvious typing errors have been silently corrected. .

1. Handwritten, 4pp, on paper printed with the heading A.F.C.A.
Cambridge Military Camp

A. F. C. A.³
Cambridge Military Camp
1/ 10/ 891
Survey Troop, N.Z.A.
Te Kauwhata.

[February 1942]⁴

Dear Gray,

Disregard above address as we are due to shift. A sorrow that consumes our hearts, for this is the best thing I've struck.

I'm officially storeman of this Troop, in reality quartermaster-rousteabout [sic]. There are only thirty in this show, one officer and one sergeant. We live like a large scale family, all having more or less common taste. The majority are Varsity boys, and the majority are damned good fellows to work with. Only one bombardier mars our little heaven's galaxy.

For three weeks past we have been out of Hopu Hopu,⁵ a wandering, semi-independent troop, though drawing our stores there. We are camped a mile from Te Kauwhata⁶ township, partly in an orchard. The local people have a tradition of magnificent hospitality, open handed with all things. One damsel tonight smuggled me a bottle of wine; a bloke living near brings us beer regularly from Rangiriri.⁷ They arrange dances, card evenings & socials for us. We are the envy of the Hopu Hopu boys. Not the least attraction is a lassie of the district for whose fair face I earned myself seven days C.B.—fortunately commuted.⁸ How I will regret leaving her. But we are transients, and our O.C. promises us battle at the end of each week presumably to discourage lavish living. So I must sigh and slide. We are to retreat to a mountain fastness, close to my old haunt of Y. M. days.⁹

My main job in life is drawing of stores. My afternoons are comparatively free. Where you have the gulls' cries in your ears, I have only the cry of my profane comrades, or the threatening whine of a diving mosquito. Mosquitoes abide in hordes, and the night is full of their song. Our surroundings are attractive. We are on a major height, and look across to the recesses of the Paeroa hills.¹⁰ To the south is Huntly, lying in a plain rich in colour, braided with

³ A.F.A.C.: Armed Forces Christian Alliance.

⁴ Graham Perkins [GP] notes: "Written in Feb. 1942, during the initial three months' training which was due to end on 2 March 1942. While in camp at Papakura, just prior to leaving for service in the South Island, I was able to visit him in Hopuhopu [sic] camp on 17 Jan 1942. He remembered this occasion and refers to it in his letter of 29Apr 45 [Letter 18]."

⁵ Hopu Hopu: farming locality on east bank of Waikato River, site of Ngaruawahia Military Camp.

⁶ Te Kauwhata: township 19 km north of Huntly in Waikato.

⁷ Rangiriri: farming locality 16km north of Huntly, site of defence works during Waikato war in 1863.

⁸ C.B.: confined to barracks.

⁹ Y.M.: presumably YMCA.

¹⁰ Paeroa hills: to the East, at the base of Coromandel Peninsula.

the willows that mark the course of every stream, lake and Waikato meander.¹¹ The willows are prolific, for much of the land is swamp. A great deal is the sullen and sour marsh; some stretches have definite beauties, particularly as the convolvulus covering them is now flowering.¹² Our next berth has little to offer, apart from its near isolation.

The Troop itself is engaged in military map making. Amateur strategists may work out some significance from this.

You will possibly have heard of the 3rd. Battery's mutiny & walk out over the vexed leave question. Our conditions are peculiar to the Northern District, and there is wide spread disaffection in the camps due to the way we have been subject to petty amendments and curtailings. The real reason I think is staleness setting in, a demobilization being in this respect advisable. Lack of interest has become an aggravated chafing at discipline. And this is worsened by the attendant evidence of bungling and incompetence we have bewailed before this. The 1st. Field is a lamentable example.

However, we live for the phantom of demobilization scheduled to occur March 2nd when Varsity boys may be jerked out. I exist on hopes.

This exhausts my mind & energy. I was home Wednesday, and found that Utopian atmosphere home seems to assume. I missed your family thru pressure of time.¹³ Paper is finished; likewise self.

Yours
Ken

¹¹ Huntly: mining town on the Waikato River

¹² This environment is recalled in KS's well known poem "Waikato Railstop" (1958).

¹³ GP's family, like KS's, lived in Point Chevalier, a suburb of Auckland on the Waitemata Harbour.

2. Typewritten, 2pp; undated, post-marked Maungaturoto, 30 July 1942

1/10/891
1st. Survey Troop N.Z.A.
Waipu,
North Auckland

Wednesday.¹⁴

Dear Gray,

Your letter has just been received and behold me prompt at the machine d'écriture [sic]. My typing is somewhat erratic simple soul that I be with mechanical things. So be ready for amazing variations on the usual spelling of words I can only assure you I know are spelt differently. The space bar is a contrivance of the devil as far as I am concerned, though very handy in the writing of verse in the most advanced style as favoured by the devotees of Ezra Pound and E.E. Cummings [.]¹⁵ I am working on a theory of modern verse and layout, a thesis to be published with a most imposing title...you know the sort of thing "Notes on the cerebro paranoic elements in the Paris School of Rapallo verse" This will be known as THE SMITHYMAN THEORY and will be inflicted on those bloody fools who think you can find out about language and poetry from a text-book. It will be I am afraid a short thesis: but the quality of that work will be rousing comment in the unborn ages among students of the rare and devious alleys of our literature.

The quotation you enclose is a peculiar variation on one known to me, but such a variation as to make me wonder if I may not be thinking of something else. It hurts me to reveal my ignorance, but I cant tell you for certain whence it comes. Not Hamlet, my old and rare—that I'll guarantee. The quote itself runs...The man who has no music in his soul is fit for treason, stratagems and spoil (I think)¹⁶. The 'murder, larceny and crime' of your local lassie is so redundant as to make one shudder in ascribing it to the Sun of Avon. (and source of the Stratford income) He was God knows free enough with his language, but even he would have drawn a very distinct line thru any such atrocity as this. Its bad enough to be from one of the most admired works of R. Kipling. Or W. Wordsworth.¹⁷

The thing itself as you have realised is so well known as to be almost non-placeable except by withered females of our Schools who discuss the immaterial and pedantic aspects of the plays with great fluidity and little perception. I suggest myself the first scene of Twelfth Night, the same speech that contains the O play that strain again. You may remember Beaver Ash constraining

¹⁴ Written at Waipu, town in Northland 41km south of Whangarei.

¹⁵ Ezra Pound (1895-1972), American Modernist poet who lived in Rapallo, Italy and was notorious for broadcasting support of Mussolini during World War II; E.E. Cummings (1894-1962), American poet noted for typographical experimentation.

¹⁶ Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, V.i., "The man that has no music in himself,/Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,/Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils..."

¹⁷ William Wordsworth (1770-1850), and Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), English writers, unpopular with those of Modernist temperament like KS.

us to letter it.¹⁸ There are after all only thirty seven plays ascribed to W S. The young lass could read them with edification. She'd probably enjoy the rabid patriotism of the Henry 4 group—they're the last word in how to be loyal in many volumes.

Re the aged Beaver. You may not know that the Bledisloe Prize of the Art Annual Exhibition¹⁹ went to him this year. Not that the work had great qualities. But it was the only one that met with the demands of the Prize. Beaver himself thought so little of it he offered it for sale, and reserved the other one he was showing, a very competent job. There were in this years show two big canvases by Weeks the Northcote man who paints this land the way I want to write about it...very dark and full of magnificent colouring within a very limited range, sombre and strong.²⁰

I am still a humble gunner. The sententious Artillery catchphrase Once a gunner always a gunner looks too blasted apposite for my eyes. We have just been made an accounting unit, in which case I should soon be elevated to the aristocracy and become a Staff Sgt. To which my job entitles me. But knowing the ways of the bastard who runs this Troop I see this happening with the utmost difficulty. This burst of egoism set out to be congratulation to you on your two stripes, not undeserved.

I admire the facilities of your office staff. I have been trying for some time to get a WWSA to be my assistant.²¹ But the boss wont indent for one. Not that he doubts my intention or attitude to the fair wenches in khaki. They are as he knows of the lewdest.

Work we do could not be done entirely by women as it involves strenuous lugging of poles up very steep hills. (for 'we' above read rest of Troop, not me). But there is no reason why women should not be trained to do the computation involved, as they are being trained to do as gun specs. Women, said the well known storeman when interviewed by the Waibuggateatree Times (do not confuse with London paper of same name) have a definite place in the Survey Troop. The place is unspecified. As A G Macdonnell says Woman's place is in bed.²² I fear the Army makes me coarse.

My job though I get intensely annoyed at times is eminently suitable for my purposes. Whenever I wish to write I retire to my P W D shack which serves as store and spread out the petrol accounts.²³ Then I set to work to write. This afternoon being wet and the boss being absent I set to work and wrote a whole string of poems to the sister-in-law of my printing pal.²⁴ I am trying to convince myself I am in love with her. If I write enough you can never tell what may happen. Her own attitude to me I do not doubt. I hope my facile verse may change

¹⁸ "Beaver" Ash: John Willsted Ash (1865-1942), art teacher at Seddon Memorial Technical College which Smithyman and Perkins both attended.

¹⁹ Bledisloe Prize: actually Bledisloe Medal for New Zealand Landscape Painting.

²⁰ John Weeks (1886-1965): well-known Auckland painter who painted in a quasi-cubist manner; he was trained in Paris and taught at Elam School of Art.

²¹ WWSA: Women's War Service Auxiliary, established in 1942.

²² Macdonnell: Archibald Gordon Macdonell (1895-1942), Scottish writer, author of *England, Their England* (1933).

²³ P W D: Public Works Department

²⁴ The printing pal was probably R.W. (Bob) Lowry (1912-1963) who had attended Teachers' College with KS (as a mature student) and who edited the college magazine *Manuka* which printed his first poems; associated with many small publishing houses including Unicorn Press, Pelorus Press, Pilgrim Press and Wakefield Press.

that. If it dies I'll probably have to write a series of obscenities to restore my independence. The affaire romantique has such complexity I foresee a crop of metaphysical poems will be needed to explain my attitude to curious posterity.

This is sufficient blather for any of Gods humble creatures to read at one sitting. I envy you the music of Picton.²⁵ I am missing good music horribly at the present. Possibly you are too. I apologise for the malice of the last remark and am

Yours

Ken

²⁵ Picton: South Island town where Perkins was currently stationed.

3. Handwritten, 4pp, undated

1/ 10/ 891
1st Survey Troop NZA
Paihia,
Bay of Islands

Tuesday. [11 August 1942]²⁶

Dear Gray,

I don't know if I've written to you since taking quarters at the above address. But as you may see, we bid well to be a bunch of gipsies when you consider our moves. This, as a camp site is the best we've struck. I attempt to describe it within the limits of security, this being a fortress area.

Like your own self I have ended up by the sea. I assume you know the general layout of this part of the Bay, and how we stand in relation to Russell, Opuia etc.²⁷ The beach here reminds me of Waiheke,²⁸ and a little of the coast camp where we had our bach.²⁹ It is brighter than the muddy beaches of the city, due to the considerable mixture of orange shell in the sand. At low tide there is not much difference from high, when I think of the acres of dolorous mud flat so long and painfully visible at Point.³⁰ There is, moreover, an attempt at surf—one solitary wave breaks at any time, though this is augmented when the easterlies drive in. Then we have a passable thunder on the sand, there is spray on the rocks at either end of the beach, and the launches smack up and down with consequent horrors to my imaginative stomach. At such time our naval aspirants draw themselves up in attempt to look romantically at home with salt in their nostrils.

The weather has been tolerable, rough with smooth. There was a magnificent grey sheen on the water this morning, with the sun rising through an early mist. With such trivialities we compensate ourselves for the strain on nerves that result from forced association with our O.C.

I disdain rubbernecking in these places, assuming rather a god like indifference to the historic pilgrimages.³¹ But I must confess that I had real pleasure in wandering through the local churchyard. The church itself was built in 1925, a tasteful job in stone, very much in harmony with its surroundings. Almost immediately behind it, the bank ascends steeply; at its foot the graves, partly surrounded by lawns, partly overgrown by perrywinkles [sic] (or bluebells?) a profusion of colour. There are poplars as well, stripped at present but very lovely with their austerity and the calm bark. The manuka, which ravages the major part

²⁶ GP notes: "Written at Paihia. First mention that his mother had been ill. He met up with some of my former colleagues who had returned from their stint in Marlborough Sounds. Opportunities now arising for transfer to Air-Force, Answered by me on 18 Aug. 1942."

²⁷ Settlements in the Bay of Islands (as is Pahia).

²⁸ Island in the Hauraki Gulf

²⁹ Glinks Gully, on the west coast near Te Koporu, Northland, where KS spent his early years.

³⁰ i.e. Point Chevalier, where KS and GP both lived.

³¹ Paihia in the Bay of Islands, Northland, was the site of an early Anglican missionary settlement, 60km north of Whangarei. For poetic recollections of this period see "Paihia Remembered" (1951), *Collected Poems 1943-95* (2004).

of the lands hereabouts, stands at a decent distance behind them. It is the true king here, for whatever is left empty a while comes soon under its dominion.³²

A grotesque fancy struck me the other day. It was showery and gray, the right weather to visit a graveyard. One then appreciates its atmosphere. I came across one grave like the others, untended. The headstone was broken, and its characters erased by the elements beloved of Victorian novelists. It had thus no personality, the heart once pregnant may be laid there, but for me it has [no] feature to distinguish it from the hordes of the anonymous who in some measure shaped this North. Around the grave was a railing, a barrier that outlasted the identity of the one who occasioned its erection. From the far corner of the plot, a sapling wound up, its roots bedded well, its trunk twisted as if growth had been hard. The foliage was half torn away, probably by wind so it had no crown to flourish. Weeds rambled on the surface, tossing arrogantly. And amid them, to complete my catalogue of symbols of mortality, an empty bottle lay, mute but inconceivably eloquent.

It flashed on me that here were all the cynic symbols of human mortality, visible commentary. I played with the fancy for days, it still delights me, which is why I present it to you at this length. I hope you enjoy it—though the secret may well be in the mood engendered by sea, rain, macrocarpas, and the nature notes appended previously.

The country behind is wild, for miles only scrub. I had a decently long trip today to Okaihau, Kaikohe and Kawakawa.³³ As we went out the mist had not lifted entirely, and the sun struck brilliant on spider webs. Never have I been so conscious of their quality as this morning when I saw them in quantity. I don't remember this part, except Paihia itself, but I should dearly like to see further north. This country constantly arouses me as I have written so often. It must [be] in the blood. It is most definitely an integral feature of my mental structure.

I had a letter from home today. Mum apparently has been ill, but the extent is hard to judge.³⁴ She, unlike her son says little of any ailments, so I can only judge from what she has said, and magnify it. This may be unduly [word missing; anxious?] on my part, but I am glad my furlough is due on Monday next. I would like to be home, as is natural, but especially so now either of my parents is liable to be crook. Dad has secured hearing aids from the Disabilities etc. God knows where, but I gather that he now has no difficulty in hearing any one say "Have another?" Not that he did hitherto. . . Thomas Cat is reported as a gadabout; he has only half the equipment of a fully able Thomas, but from what I saw last time on leave, he's developed it to a stage where any normal cat would be easily eclipsed. And the impulses with it.

This wondrous scrawl is doubtless enough for any one to attempt. So I shall hie me to bed, comfortable in my shack (P.W.D. courtesy of). When the wind hits, everything shakes. The Wellington quakes would pass unnoticed after the training I've had.

So, comfortably, I'm
Yours,
Ken.

³² It is now understood that manuka (tea-tree) provides a perfect cover for the regeneration of native bush.

³³ Okaihau, Kaikohe and Kawakawa: settlements in Northland.

³⁴ The earliest reference to the illness of KS's mother. She died 26 May 1945 (see Letter 19).

I forgot to mention I'm associating with Artillery gentlemen (socially) not unknown to you. . . . Bruiser Forman's merry boys. Do you know Murray Pulham? He's brother of an ex-girl friend. Very nice.

4. Handwritten, 3 pp.

1/ 10/ 891
1st. Survey Troop NZA.
Paihia,
Bay of Islands,

Tuesday 25th [August 1942]

Dear Gray,

Furlough, alas and alack, is over.³⁵ I write this at the side of my stretcher, not, as I would wish, within reach of my bed. For seven nights I enjoyed the civilized delights of sheets and pillow cases, of bed lamps and carpets, of those commonplace delights of the civilians. Now they are done. But the regret for them remains. I am fond of the pleasures of my gross carcase [sic], though in all honesty I must admit that my Army way is not so bad.

My new quarters are in a corrugated iron garage, more waterproof than my ex P.W.D. bungalow. It has the elements of comfort and the great virtue of privacy. This last I may have to yield somewhat, 50% at least. But one can under these circumstances be more oneself than in the enforced community of a tent, where consideration of others' feelings earns little for one's own. But enough of moaning. The transient inflation of leave is still on me and I feel happy. Like you, I now have two stripes whose sole virtue is their complete insurance of no mess fatigues or such bloody irritants.³⁶ And that is their total value.

Your letter of the 11th I did not get till today on return, but the later reached me at home. It was then too late of course to postpone my furlough, as I would have. But I'll try to get a special leave on the 14th, even if the family have to have a lamentable sickness at that time. I may even be sick myself – I did my damndest last week to catch measles. Failing all else, you shall have my blessing.

I should like to be able to offer on that date a first edition of the Works of ME, but owing to international conditions this noble effort (see above) is indefinitely postponed.

I spare you an account of my furlough doings, They were both profitable and entertaining. I fear that this child is growing a little too fond of alcohol. Khayam may be a nice example, but in practice the liquor may just somehow be a bastard at later date.³⁷ But it is a reaction to camp and an avenue of escape.

One event is notable. Apart from now being on nodding terms with Mason³⁸ (publishes *In Print*) who was possibly New Zealand's finest poet

³⁵ KS' military records indicate that he was on furlough from 17 to 25 August 1942.

³⁶ Two stripes: signifying the rank of corporal.

³⁷ Omar Khayam (1048 – 1131) was a poet, mathematician, philosopher and astronomer who lived in Persia; he is best known for his poetry, and, outside Iran, for the quatrains (*rubaiyaas*) in *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, popularized through Edward Fitzgerald's re-created translation; the poems often allude to the pleasures of drinking wine.

³⁸ R.A. K. Mason (1905-1971): New Zealand poet; his selected poems, *This Dark Will Lighten* was published by the Caxton Press in 1941. He was a socialist and trade unionist; *In Print* was a trade union publication he edited; he lived in Auckland.

(see *Folios of New Writing*, '41)³⁹ and Fairburn,⁴⁰ whose work you may know, I met May Smith.⁴¹ Do you recall her painting—ultra modern, and almost the only Auckland who paints in this mode without palpable imitation? We exchanged candid remarks; she invited me to her studio yesterday to swap more, and asked for a chance to retaliate. I am sending her a reply to her request in some of my latest works! God help me if she loses it as I'm too lazy to make a copy of anything I write. I can only pray she takes good care of my precious scribble. I demanded from her a candid comment, and I'll pass her opinions on to you if they materialise. She has a background of cosmopolitan experience, a taste for modernism and an enquiring mind. Auguries of what? Honesty I hope. It is all I ask of anyone.

The return trip today I made in daylight. It was long, from 8 o'clock till six. In parts it was wearisome. But there were stretches of real delight that filled me with my old passion for this land. Harshness in scrub, for today was a grey day and all in tune with the bitter melody of the North, and sensuous colour—hundreds of yards of willows newly in leaf, their roots and trunks lost in still flood water so that their branches lay on the surface; moss and green slime trailing from them. For miles I was filled with the imperative desire to write. I had phrases, sentences and thunder in my mind. But my hand is tired, and this is as far as I get.

So to bed. I dream of that never never time when we shall be free to come here leisurely together and enjoy it all. I will read a while, a Restoration play by Wycherley, bawdy and cynical.⁴² I commend him to you. In this day of Methodist grace he is unashamedly delighted to tumble in the hay.

As ever
Yours
Ken

³⁹ *Folios of New Writing*: a periodical edited by John Lehmann and published by the Hogarth Press in 1940-41; it was later replaced by *Penguin New Writing*; Mason was discussed in an article by William Plomer, "Some Books from New Zealand" in Volume 4, Autumn 1941.

⁴⁰ A.R.D. Fairburn (1904-1957), New Zealand poet and journalist. *Dominion*, a long poem was published by the Caxton Press in 1938; *Poems 1929-41* was published by Caxton in 1943; he lived in Auckland.

⁴¹ May Smith (1906-88), artist, born in India, came to New Zealand in 1921; studied at Elam School of Art, 1925-27 and at Royal College of Art, London, 1928-32; she lived in Auckland. Her best known work is *Characterisation in Colour*, 1941 (Auckland Art Gallery).

⁴² William Wycherly (1640-1710), Restoration playwright, author of *The Country Wife* (1675) and *The Plain Dealer* (1676).

5. Handwritten, 2pp.

All this and Heaven too!!⁴³

A C 2 Smithyman W K
Flight 3 Group 11
Camp 3
RNZAF Station
Whenuapai⁴⁴

Monday 28th (Dec) before lunch [1942]

Dear Gray,

How many times I have begun a letter with an apology and then to do it again. Somehow I suspect it's a habit I won't lose readily, so those (who) have the dubious favour of my pen will be ultimately used to it. But I must apologise for not wishing you the best of Christmas in time. The wish was tacit but regrettably, not expressed. So please accept these belated wishes and may they strengthen you in recovery from these indiscretions one is apt at this season to force upon a suffering digestion.

All my mail this Christmas went by the board. Being in hospital when it should have been written, it wasn't.⁴⁵ I was too bloody bored to do anything. It was a glorious chance to swot the pre-entry stuff we do. I didn't. Or to learn the Morse code. As it was I went in knowing five letters and came out knowing three. I am very fond of doing nothing but I hate to have to do it by compulsion. So I did nothing, and loathed it.

Fortune following the foolish I was released on sick leave for the fatal Christmas day and go on New Year for a week. Family celebrations were not of the brightest as you may imagine. Mum was having a dismal spasm. But in the city I rejoiced and had a tolerable time. Christmas Eve in particular must go on record as the weirdest that ever fell to this child; beer and bawdiness in good poetic measure. The record of that night I cannot commit to paper, the Post Office being prissy about such matters. On the strength of it I am claiming Villon and Burns as my patron saints.⁴⁶ O joy and jubilation!

The new year promises well. Had I been free I could have gone to Kawau and Waiheke⁴⁷ in a keeler with a glorious crowd, a young Englishman, a shipbuilder, and his wife who produces Dance Dramas for the W.E.A.⁴⁸ But times don't suit. They come back as I arrive.

Incidentally I met a nice WAAF while in the slaughterhouse,⁴⁹ a damsel very personable. She turns out to be Fairburn's sister-in-law;⁵⁰ we'll be on leave

⁴³ *All This and Heaven too*: popular 1940 film starring Charles Boyer and Bette Davis, from a novel by Rachel Field.

⁴⁴ KS transferred from the Army to the Air Force on 7 December 1942.

⁴⁵ KS suffered a broken hand shortly after joining the Air Force.

⁴⁶ Villon and Burns: Francois Villon (1431 – c. 1463), French poet and Robert Burns (1759-96), Scottish poet, both noted for bawdiness.

⁴⁷ Kawau and Waiheke: islands in the Hauraki Gulf near Auckland.

⁴⁸ The boat-building Englishman was Bruce Hart, the dance drama specialist was Margaret Barr (1904-91); they later separated and she moved to Australia where she had a distinguished career in dance.

⁴⁹ i.e. hospital

⁵⁰ Phillida Mays, sister of Jocelyn Mays who was married to Rex Fairburn; the poem "Lady as Swan" (1943), first published in *Inheritance* (1962), was written for her as was the unpublished "Prothlamion" [Poem 11].

together, have a luncheon date so I'm mildly interested to see how indiscreet I'll be. A WAAF would be very agreeable. So.

It's magnificently hot here today, and no wind. The camp is at Brigham's Creek – once again the countryside.⁵¹ The main road is conveniently adjacent for illegal leaves. I am not tempted. The air is full of engine noise, Hudsons drifting round.⁵² They make the pines throb and eclipse the cicadas. Across the road, on a hill a good way off a harvester is going, the hay looks mellow good for tumbling.

A Hudson overhead cut out just now. My heart went up and over with him. I was on the drome when a plane went through a hangar. It leaves an impression.

And summer is here again and the war goes on. And all I can do is wish you well in the New Year and remind you are quo fas et gloria ducunt.⁵³

Yours, Ken

⁵¹ Brigham's Creek: near Whenuapai (air force base) in West Auckland

⁵² Hudson: The Lockheed Hudson, an American built light bomber and coastal reconnaissance aircraft used extensively in WWII.

⁵³ "Where duty and glory lead": motto of the Royal New Zealand Artillery

6. Handwritten, 3pp.

NZ415786
AC2 Smithyman W.K.
Flight 8
Group 5
Whenuapai
Monday 11th [January 1943]

Dear Gray,

I wrote you circa New Year but God knows if the letter ever saw the post – I couldn't say myself. Sufficient anyway that I am back in camp fully occupied with playing soldiers.

I never liked the military way much and I don't now. The delights of bayonet drill are wholly illusory. I take no pleasure from poking steel into ti-tree and kidding myself that by so doing I contribute to the betterment of humanity.⁵⁴ It may be but I cannot convince myself of it. Nor is there any mechanical pleasure resulting from knowing the intimate ways of a Bren gun.

I tolerated the pettiness of artillery: infantry I can stand not at all. To go crawling across paddocks with a rifle is not my idea of seeing the country—but you will get the general drift of what I feel.

Overall I think it is the wholehearted and essential futility of this. The indifferent cynic that says It'll all be the same twenty years from now speaks a truth that may well be. We have seen it demonstrated once. It may come again unless we are really determined and know what we want. Yet didn't we all want peace?

Though I wonder sometimes. This war was a release of sorts—we're not so far from animalism as the proud declare. But what the hell!!

The camp I'm in now is a dispersal camp. With superb irony it is placed so that I may from my front door stare across the harbour at Point Chev. beach.

Looking back on last year I am quite satisfied with what I wrote considering the circumstances. Not as much as hitherto but I think it continues to develop and take personal shape. Can I ask more? And here in the last few days I have had a spasm, sacrificed time that should have gone to work, in writing, producing a couple of stories that have certain virtues (—or at least some virtues, certainty being lacking) A typewriter would be a great asset. I must make an effort but I doubt if anything will come of it.

Bob Lowry has invited me to write for the 3rd division paper, as progressive entries [sic] and I intend to do what I can. The Army is too close to describe yet, but I may use something of the last year. God witnesses the days of Sanderson,⁵⁵ and surely I could get something from them. But I fancy myself a return to the North to work out kid stories as I was doing in '41; reflection on them I find more to my taste, an escape from this probably. Poetry is still my truest vehicle, but its field is so limited in publication.

This is all the miscellany I can scrape together for now. I feel rather restless, looking for the day when I can get back to the North and have a stab at doing what I want, to get it down on paper properly.

⁵⁴ Ti-tree: KS probably means manuka, often known as tea-tree or ti-tree, but possibly the cabbage tree, cordyline australis, also known to the Maori as ti.

⁵⁵ KS' Commanding Officer.

So for the present I am
Yours
Ken

7. Handwritten, 5pp

AC 2 Smithyman W.K.
Flight 8
201 Squadron
RNZAF Station
Whenuapai

Friday night [5 February 1943]

Dear Gray,

This is as good a time as any to write letters. It is ten thirty, and outside the gums are full of the night wind, very low and dark and full of rain. It's a cool wind, which is partly why I keep inside instead of standing watching stars. I'm on guard, hence the midnight soliloquies. And one gets tired of stars unless in the right company.

Today I came back from leave; we get forty eight hours after ten days duty, going noon till noon. This was Anniversary day in Auckland. The roads and trams were busy with the usual crowd one sees now, women and kids going to picnics. It struck me this morning as I waited for the bus, the terrific difference there is now in any cross section of society, the gap of men.

And it has taken war to give the common things a new significance. You will know yourself how mundane objects and situations are invested with a spirit, a depth, that hits ones conscious mind suddenly, so that one sees them not thru the traditional glass, but in a new and disturbing light. The land affects me that way. I find it almost hard to realise that here where cows cross our drill ground that bayonet dummies are now as much part of the picture as apple trees or cow droppings.

I imagine that in this I am always unconsciously trying to recapture the past, though the past is as much part of my daily life as the present. I wonder how many others are doing the same. Perhaps our whole society carries on that way. But to what degree[?]

From this camp most of the city can be seen brilliant with street lights by night as you have known it before. It is an easy compromise this: one is in the country but still part of the town.

As usual I am still looking to the day when I can get back to the North. From the back of our place this morning I heard the gulls on the beach, the sound that moves me like great music. And I'd be one with Faust to be free to go to the coast and the Kaipara again.⁵⁶

There is little to be said of camp life. Half the time we do infantry work, and half, pre-entry Air force work, the deadly grind through the assignments. The infantry I'm afraid hasn't the same appeal as the artillery had. Behold the inveterate gunner!

Wednesday last I bought a new sports outfit to be decently dressed on leave. (You may note that one doesn't wear B.D. on leave.⁵⁷) A check sports coat, fawnish without an obtrusive stripe, and grey flannels. Plus tie. The whole get up made me childishly pleased, so the streets of Auckland may look forward to seeing it, I hope, frequently.

⁵⁶ Kaipara: large harbour on the west coast north of Auckland.

⁵⁷ B.D.: possibly Battle Dress

The major part of my personal news concerns the stuff I sent to E.H. McCormick in Wellington. I think I mentioned it to you before. This week McCormick wrote to me, a letter that was all I could ask! We agree on general statements about the works, a healthy sign, though I would quibble over instances he cites. Perhaps inevitably. But if you will pardon the vanity, I'll quote with due regard! – I can't as the letters not with me. And I haven't memorized it yet!⁵⁸

He was most encouraging, saying of the poetry that it was “good, fresh, and passionate” the last not necessarily in the conventional sense! Extravagance of phrases and ideas leads to obscurity, as I will readily admit. He says in conclusion, that it is usual to end a critique with “shows marked promise”, but he would scorn such condescension. He had enjoyed reading the work, and urged me to carry on to let time give form and depth. “After all you are your chief critic.”

All of which pleased me greatly, as encouragement goes a long way in view of present difficulties. It is easier to keep quiet, but God knows why, this is the only thing I keep hammering at. For what? Not profit most assuredly. Fame? I doubt it. It seems only to satisfy the urge in me, to write without question.

I'm too tired now to make fun of these pontific nothings, so they must stand in their lamentable sorry state.

And so to bed, still

Yours,

Ken.

⁵⁸ E.H. McCormick, well known scholar and writer about New Zealand art and literature, author of *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, (1940).

8. Handwritten, 3pp.

NZ 4215786

AC 2

Levin

Sunday morning 8 [August 1943]⁵⁹

Dear Gray,

Sunday morning “fate’s great bazaar” and me sitting in the sun outside the hut. This place gets on my nerves, particularly when I want to write and can’t which is the way I am at present. I’ll be out of here soon Thank God, but where is a mystery. But my home address will find me.

Your letter was most welcome, & disturbing. This neutral army business of the ground staff irritates me; now I’m safely removed from the firing line I’m getting quite bellicose. I expect to be in the islands soon, so will get my guts full no doubt. Give me the chance and I’d be back with the Arty.⁶⁰

This course is bloody boring, duller than anything I’ve ever tried. It’ll be over soon, & then hi ho for somewhere else.

Levin itself is tolerable.⁶¹ The town reminds me of Dargaville except that it’s cleaner and has fewer pubs.⁶² And the Tararuas look well, the taller back ranges generously snowed.⁶³ It’s cold, but I’ve known colder. And we have really warm days like this. But the life is intolerably flat. The damsel I’ve been chasing has been transferred here from Whenuapai, which is a consolation and a hellish distraction.⁶⁴ Things were bad enough when I used to waste time writing but now I haven’t the S.M. for hours to snatch a few minutes gossip with her & get no work done.

Not that I’m growing conscientious. But success in marks means increased pay, and I can do with that. After two years I’ve saved 25/-.

I’ve actually nothing to write about. The life is comparatively sober, dull & chaste.

Last month I managed to produce quite a bit: it’s getting better all the time but it’ll be a long time before I’m satisfied. Which is a good thing.

I was home on a weekend recently, & saw some of Keith Sinclair’s stuff.⁶⁵ He’s made a deal of progress in the last year, but his chief fault is still his lack of discipline in writing. Not the discipline of “patterned” verse, mathematical verse, the sort of thing Bill Burley regards as the be-all & end-all, but the discipline of ideas with the exact words.⁶⁶ For my own part I’m writing largely in formal measures mainly a mixture of Auden & Yeats, & perhaps for that reason

⁵⁹ KS transferred to Levin 24 June 1943

⁶⁰ Arty: i.e. artillery.

⁶¹ Levin: town in the Horowhenua district, 90km north of Wellington

⁶² Dargaville, town in Northland on northern banks of Wairoa River, close to Te Kopuru where KS was born; he lived in Dargaville briefly before moving to Auckland.

⁶³ Tararuas: mountain range in southern North Island.

⁶⁴ i.e. Phillida Mays.

⁶⁵ Keith Sinclair (1922-1993), poet and historian, also lived in Point Chevalier and was a friend of KS since school days; Sinclair was also in the Armed Forces.

⁶⁶ Bill Burley: W.E. Burley, B.A. was the HOD for “English and General Subjects”, and acting principal of Seddon Memorial Technical College for two terms in 1938.

Keith's work affects me so. He has a very real talent & when he matures his verse will be worth reading. It is now, but he is still his chief enemy in that his personality is a mixture of adolescent and adult, & that leaves his pen. Once he overcomes that he'll be right.

Thank you for your good wishes. In these present circumstances it's heartening to feel that I'm not alone with what I write. People like yourself, Bob Lowry,⁶⁷ and Phillida Mays give added strength. I hope you're not backing an illusion.

I've been doing a lot of rambling thinking this week, much of North Auckland. And since your letter came, of this and that. Do you remember the holly trees & the paddock we used to play in behind your place? And walking to Avondale & through Mt Albert one Sunday night a few years back? The Sunday at Waiheke, and God knows how many Sundays in the ranges, lying in the grass beside that stump where you tried a stunt photograph? The line of the Manukau heads, and the run down from Titirangi to New Lynn? Some day we'll have that sort of thing again.⁶⁸

That's the supreme summing up of our attitude to this bloody war. Herbert Read says "there is no glory in the deed until he wears a tarnished braid!" and precious little glory then.⁶⁹ But plenty of tarnish.

The wise and journalists who like to ticket things will have to find another lable [sic] for us since they ticketed our elder brothers with The Lost Generation.⁷⁰ Christ knows they're a generation of picnics [sic] to us who were born after one war, schooled in the depression, and graduated into the Army.

We have seen virtually all things shattered. We are, those of us who think, sophists by birth and confirmed in the habit of doubt. What values can we take as permanent? Precious few out of our way of life. If we go back to the country and look at the soil for strength, we find it betrayed and betraying. At the best the humanist spirit of this country, of its roads, its paddocks, hills crops and waters, is a palliative and not a matter for life itself. I see little remedy or hope in anything, though I turn more and more to Communist philosophy as a chance. Chance we must reckon on, since so much has been born from it.

So we must trust—though that's the wrong word—that the good fairy will remember us after the war, give us a certain measure for security, a drop or two of some anodyne to make things right that we may for a while at least, spit in the eyes of the seven sisters trying to blind them.

Please pardon this bastard of a pen. It's hell to write with & my script's lousy enough at any stage.

I've read very little since I came here, and the things that impressed me aren't new. I reread Morgan's "Sparkenbroke", for which I have a great admiration.⁷¹ Truth & beauty, and superb prose, though cold. Compare him perhaps to Elgar;⁷² his spirit is essentially and peculiarly English. A little Kipling this week, who excites and annoys me, and last week two Tchekov plays The

⁶⁷ Bob Lowry, printer and publisher, published KS' first book *Seven Sonnets* in 1946

⁶⁸ The places mentioned are all in Auckland or its environs.

⁶⁹ Herbert Read (later Sir Herbert) (1893-1968), English poet, art historian and critic.

⁷⁰ The Lost Generation: phrase first used by Gertrude Stein and taken up by Ernest Hemingway to refer to the American writers who repudiated America and settled in Europe in the 1920s, including T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

⁷¹ Charles Morgan (1894-1958), British novelist; *Sparkenbroke*, a novel, was published in 1936

⁷² Elgar: Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934), English composer.

Seagull and the Cherry Orchard, both moving & excellent as burlesque. I refuse to approach Tchekov with the worship he seems to draw.⁷³

I had a letter from home this week, Mum saying that my ginger cobber Nutting at the Library wants your address, which I'll send her.⁷⁴ Topsy still has one pup with her—she was in excellent trim when I saw her last. The family themselves are doing well, mother particularly.

There is nothing more to stick down here. I'll write again when something happens and this bloody pen goes better.

Be good and don't go crazy in the scrub.

Yours

Ken.

⁷³ Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), Russian playwright and story writer; *The Seagull* (1894) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) are among his best known plays.

⁷⁴ Nina Nutting: librarian at Point Chevalier library.

9. Handwritten, 3pp.

NZ 4215786
AC 2 Smithyman W. K.
A Block A 4/3
RNZAF Nelson

Monday night 20th September [1943]⁷⁵

Dear Gray,

There's buggar-all [sic] to write about, but as this shows I'm still alive and more or less active. That is, as active as I'm ever likely to be. Taking my cue from Petronius Arbiter I shall be content to win to fame through indolence.⁷⁶ The job at the moment doesn't call for a deal of exertion, which suits me, and the moral responsibility such as it is, I blithely ignore, a thing for which I have great aptitude. Life is so much easier if one can develop indifference to a degree.

Nelson station is a bit boring. One must live on the station on ones own resources, the books I carry with me, those available in the library (a mixed bag, sadly mixed), some Nina Nutting sends me, and my own writing. Every time I write a letter my writing comes into it. Pardon the intrusion, but it's the constant factor, the thing that keeps me myself and not just another bloody erk,⁷⁷ one of the bloodless wonders who'll never see any action. That may sound like the attitude of those who can wish for service knowing themselves safe but I don't think it is. Sometimes it is, sometimes not. However -----

Do you know Nelson town at all?⁷⁸ I like it. It's complacent, provincial, rather lethargic, not content to be itself and let time take its course, but aim [sic] to be another Christchurch. It soothes me. Ultimately I suppose it would put me to sleep, which would be alright providing I didn't dream.

What is there to tell about the place or the country, except the elections, and praise God, I'll spare you them.

The kowhai is out here. I have seen a single tree, clumped in some alien dark green companions, and its sheen was a loveliness for any eyes. It is in a ploughed paddock which looked, after light rain, how earth should look in spring, rich and fecund, as moving as the face of a pregnant woman in repose. And over that wet soil, that yellow blazon. It was good.

The daffodils are in full song, and jonquils and snowdrops, though it's two months since they broke through round Levin, and Auckland of course had them earlier than that. And there are willows that make you smile, with twist and curl and casual grace of their leaves, and make you laugh at old bald heads of hammer clusters that are sturdily denying the season and sticking up a concord of bare branches most arrogantly and stupidly and fondly bare. They make war seem what it is essentially: a state that will pass, while mechanically, the earth repeats itself and constantly spreads itself for the land. And the heart, especially the heart.

⁷⁵ KS transferred to Nelson 17 August 1943.

⁷⁶ Petronius Arbiter (c. 27-66), Roman author of *Satyricon*; he was a by-word for indolence.

⁷⁷ erk: military slang for aircraft maintenance person.

⁷⁸ Nelson: city on Tasman Bay in the northern part of the South Island

Out of all these things comes the affirmation that someday we'll go into the Waitakeres again, and find Waikowhai in September,⁷⁹ trail round the wharves—do this and that which are incidentals, but tremendously important in themselves and in their part. For they all add up to happiness, and what does any man seek but that? Housman's ghost is grinning at me.⁸⁰

Topsy dog is in pup again. I don't feel right away from her. I may be able to get home next month for my birthday. I hope so. Sentimental in some respects.

Write to me sometime when you've spare time. We must keep [in] touch even, especially at this distance and juncture. It's thirteen years now since we first met. Long time, long way.

I'm becoming ponderous and shall save you that. Give my regards to any you run across in Necal whose trail I've crossed.⁸¹ We'll drink beer on the back verandah some Sunday morning.

Be good, cherub.

Yours,

Ken.

I'm still, regrettably, a gunner at heart.

⁷⁹ Waitakeres: forested ranges west of Auckland; Waikowhai: bay on Manukau Harbour near Auckland.

⁸⁰ Housman: A.E. Housman (1859-1936), English poet and classical scholar known for his pessimism.

⁸¹ Necal: code name for New Zealand base in the Solomon Islands (Guadalcanal) in the Pacific where Perkins was serving.

10. Handwritten, 3pp.

NZ 4215786
AC 2 –
A Block A 4/3
RNZAF Nelson.

Wednesday, 29th September. [1943]⁸²

My dear Gray,

God knows where you'll be when this reaches you, the news of NZ army on Guadalcanar has just been released, though I heard of it earlier. I have as usual no incidental gossip but may be able to remedy that next week for I think I'll be able to get home a while.

You asked in the last letter I had, for something I've written and you shall have it willingly, not that I seek an audience—my public as you know is bloody small—or that it may have value in it—it may have, I can't judge—but it is sent as reminder that out of this nettle patch there is still at least an effort being made to pluck some flower, not safety of the original phrase, but security.⁸³ The poetry, after all, is security to me. Its so much part of me, good or ill in its content, that it grows more and more. It's not always a comfortable or easy thing to carry, this desire to create.

Since it's so long that you've seen any of these scrawls—and you have always had a prior right to see them if you wished—I don't rightly know what to pick as representative. The styles change with moods and the cumulative effect of time. So I've taken the enclosed because they seem good to me, or because they mean much to me. And permit me to add these comments.

The "Prothlamion"⁸⁴ means much to me. I think that as a sample of my poetry, it's good. I like the images, and the rhythms in it. But its chief value is an association which I can tell you and hesitate to tell others. Apart from Phil Mays for whom it was written as so much of this year's work has been, you'll be the only one to have seen it so far. (Even garrulous souls like myself have some occasional reserves.) The poem was written in Levin, in one of our interminable lectures on stores; the original copy is on the back of a voucher. But that night she told me she'd be leaving in a couple of days, so it was one of the last times I saw her. I haven't seen her since and Lord knows when I shall again. (I include all this as it's relevant.) So after she told me I gave her this Prothlamion. A Prothlamion as you'll agree is a marriage song of sorts, and summoning all my guts, which were shaking like a hula girl's hips, I proposed to her, my only proposal to date. And was most gently turned down. What the hell would I have to marry on anyway? You'll see the reason for my attachment. Spare any one else the above details, angel. I'll give you a full description sometime. The memory of the scene makes me laugh and damn near weep, because regrettably I'm still smitten. It's

⁸² GP notes: "The poem 'Prothlamion' can certainly be dated with this letter".

⁸³ "Out of this nettle danger, we pluck this flower, safety", Shakespeare, *Henry IV*, Part 1, II, iii.

⁸⁴ Prothlamion: normally spelt "Prothalamion" as in Edmund Spenser's poem which established the genre in English.

always a mistake to get attached to anyone or anything in war time. But then I'm young and avowedly foolish.

Wednesday.

It looks as if I may have the Barrack Wardens job on my hands for a while. The F/Sgt has a touch of arthritis. The job would mean charge of accommodation, fuel etc. for the station so I'm praying for the boss's health.

To continue. The "put down..." piece is the development of the short lyrical form at which I've worked on and [off] since last year.⁸⁵ It has, I hope something of the tone of Yeats' "Woman young and old" series,⁸⁶ but with it my own tricks that make it mine and not just imitation.

These have all been written within the last two months. I've nothing older than these with me. My output is as pretty voluble as it ever was. Not even routine now can interfere with it. And any one style is a matter of any one mood.

It's raining at present and there are gulls calling. The sea is on the far side of the field, and those birds make me feel as they always do, intolerably lonely and hungry for my north. I like it here, but the north is in me and I can't get away from it. The rain has made my hand ache in last year's break so I'll spare you more.

I hope you have some pleasure from these things. I've a long way to go before I'll be satisfied with them.

Yours,
Ken.

⁸⁵ Early version of the poem "After" which begins: "Put your man down somewhere..."

⁸⁶ "A Woman Young and Old", 11-part poem included in W.B. Yeats' volume, *The Winding Stair and other poems* (1933).

11. Handwritten, 4pp.

NZ 4215786
A.C.1 Smithyman W. K.
A 4/3
RNZAF Nelson

Thursday 4th November 1943⁸⁷

My dear Gray,

Your letter of the eighteenth came today, and I can't remember whether I've written within the last month. So if in this I repeat myself, overlook it. I'm bugged I can ever remember whom I wrote to, when I wrote, and what I said.

I worked myself leave for my birthday, and landed in Auckland for a damned good week, and a full one. The principal day was the Saturday when much was scheduled. Much to the old man's annoyance he developed gout on the Friday, and so the beer had to be transported home, a procedure to be favoured. I had a very quiet evening with Andy and Keith Sinclair. Good beer, good music, and good talk. Auckland is a superb place. Strangely enough I'm very struck with Wellington. I don't know why, for it's not a patch on Auckland. And yet I like its hills and all.

The routine of this station gives me nothing to write about except the drivelling futility of this bloody life. Am now in charge of nuts, bolts, washers etc. a most interesting job. I sit and stare out the window waiting to be certified. I had a crack at getting overseas as a replacement but missed. I'm so driven to despair I'm even considering buying a set of golf clubs! The station has its own links. Conceive me in glory at the eighth hole. I hesitate to think how my game would react to no swearing, and there's a bunch of WAAF tagging to wind, so silence would be the rule. However I consider it.

Under urging from the light of my life—with whom my paper romance continues—I thought of submitting a bundle of my verses to the Progressive Publishing Society in Wellington.⁸⁸ I saw them while going north, and the manager was encouraging. I saw Fairburn in Auckland and asked his opinion of my works. He carried them off to Sewell, and both were encouraging and appeared enthusiastic.⁸⁹ F. volunteered to commend them to the Progressive so I returned to Nelson and hammered the typewriter and sweated to give my heartthrob a fitting polish, and then in they went. The selection of work for the

⁸⁷ GP notes: "Transferred to Fairhall (3 miles west of Blenheim)".

⁸⁸ Progressive Publishing Society: "Out of the spirit of the times and the cooperative bookshops set up by the optimistic socialist fellow travellers of the era arose the Progressive Publishing Society (PPS) in 1942, with ambitious plans and some notable authors (including Curnow, Fairburn, Holcroft and Sargeson) and a series, *New Zealand New Writing*, modelled on John Lehmann's *Penguin New Writing* in the United Kingdom. The PPS was not notable, however, for successful marketing decisions; and the commercial and political world was about to change again.", Ross Somerville, "The Publishers" in *Book & Print in New Zealand*, Wellington VUP, 1997.

⁸⁹ Sewell: Arthur Sewell, professor of English at University of Auckland 1934-46.

Progressive is in the hands of Prof. Gordon of Victoria and I wait his yea or nay.⁹⁰ I'm not greatly concerned either way, but praise God you'll yet have the slim volume.

I've no comments to make on domestic news, or what happens here. I don't read the papers. In fact, I've reached the extreme of boredom, absolute indifference to whatever happens or doesn't happen. I'm neutral. Having tied myself in an emotional knot I have now only the scenery left to enjoy. Send me down a tropic sunset.

The verse continues. Nothing lately worth sending. In short, a bloody poor correspondent. Maybe I'll shoot myself and have something to write about. Be good and be lucky.

Ken.

Monday night 8th.

Written by candlelight having been transferred to Fairhall, the nearest thing to Army conditions I've yet met in the Air Force.⁹¹ It's like an Army field camp, all trees, and pastoral scenes. Tall oat grass outside the hut, and a pump that grumbles and mutters horrible things. Another stage on my pilgrimage to the loony bin.

I've decided to take History II and Political Science this coming year. God knows how far I'll get, and what work I'll do.

When you write, write home. This can be rather a gipsy life.

The trip from Nelson wasn't hellish exciting, but at least new country to me. The necessity of anti erosion planting screams to high heaven. And nothing so far as I can judge is being done by the farmers directly concerned. Black wattle is a stop gap, and surely procurable. Wattle grows easily, yet the hills will be done [sic, down?] in the valleys before they act. Man power shortage I suppose, is part of the answer.

I went to town the other day with a bloke whom the A.F. won't release. He has 25,000 acres, and one man on them. Where would he be more value?

I've not been to Blenheim yet, so have no remarks. As this is straining my eyes, [I'll] copy a poem or two for you and leave it at that.

The country here looks hellish rich, and the cereals seem to be coming the right way: without premature headiness. Too much stalk maybe, but I'm no judge. The persistent rain has played hell with conditions in some areas. Not through flooding. The worst has been in Canterbury, where the lambs started to go under.

Gossip lacking, I'll swing to verse.

The Lazarus outfit is a belated memory of O'Neill's *Lazarus Laughed*, a bloody powerful play, one of his best.⁹² I was going to borrow a Bible & study the legend which rather attracted me for a day or so. I turned the theme over and then wrote this. The changes in the refrain indicate something more felt than seen, to me, at least. You may be able to concoct a feasible explanation. I'm too damn lazy. Why do poets have critics except to tell the public what is meant.

⁹⁰ Professor Ian Gordon (1908- 2004?), professor of English at Victoria University; editor of *New Zealand New Writing*.

⁹¹ Fairhall: location of Woodburne Air Force Station on Wairau Plains in Marlborough, New Zealand.

⁹²See KS poem "Lazarus" based on Eugene O'Neill, *Lazarus Laughed*, 1925

The other is a mixture of Westland, and Kaipara.⁹³ Phil understood it to be the districts round Ruapehu, and felt a Jane Mander note in it. (She wrote of the Otamatea- Kaiwaka area, beating me to the Wairoa as a theme.)⁹⁴ So it seems to have a genuine touch somewhere, though it refers to no actual, identifiable place.

I hope you get some amusement from these. I do.

Ken.

⁹³ Possibly the poem "Record"?

⁹⁴ Jane Mander (1877-1949), author of *The Story of a New Zealand River* (1920), *The Passionate Puritan* (1922) and other novels with settings in Northland

12. Handwritten, 3pp.

NZ 4215786
A C. Smithyman W.K.
3. S. U.
RNZAF Fairhall
Blenheim

December 10th Friday [1943]

My dear Gray,

Nothing, nothing and nothing. The southwest blows through the willows, the sun wanders over, and we sleep at night. A little beer and letter writing. Not much work and bugger-all inducement. The wheat is ripening and I'm decaying into a beatific phase of inertia, mental and physical. Climate is tolerable, mess is not; my bed is comfortable, my mind messy when its occasional lift from torpor shows it to be anything at all. Mainly, this is functionless stupidity. I'm so much a cog, I can't see anything of the machine's working because I'm still bound to the routine that signifies its action. Life, in brief, continues on a practically animal plane. 'Life is real, life is earnest...' – remember the old bullshit?

The only virtue of this is that military service counts as country service for teaching. A doubtful virtue.

I still manage to have passable matter for reading. Apart from the texts which I should read and mainly don't, in traditional fashion, I've been going on stuff from Woodbourne and some Nina sent me from the Point. Included was Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, an excellent sedative.⁹⁵ It must have lost most of its greatness in translation. It's long, and that's about all. Maybe I'm too concerned with the present to appreciate the past, but I have a sneaking idea that the advocacy of so many classics is principally hot air. Dickens, Thackeray etc. Their prose, as prose, is rarely remarkable, and their characters have been equalled. Why are they so exalted? Particularly the prose men of the last century when so few wrote decently—de Quincey, Thoreau, Jeffries [sic] exceptions of course.⁹⁶

I went to Christchurch last weekend and had a day there, meeting the crowds of relatives, I was surprised to find that the young cousins have grown up and become amiable young wenches.⁹⁷ Didn't you meet Ngaire in Auckland some years ago when I was away from home in the North. She's a grand person, would make you an excellent wife. I commend her to you, but must say that she can't cook, which is the principal need in a wife.

You will remember the road to Christchurch too clearly to need the blurb with which I've padded this week's letters. Round Kaikoura it was magnificent. The sea royal blue, and inshore, the pale jade and strong almost coarse green that gives me strength. Here in Fairhall, the note is entirely pastoral and I came there to the sea amazed to find that I had missed it without knowing until, briefly, it was

⁹⁵ Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), Russian novelist; his *War and Peace* was published 1863-69.

⁹⁶ de Quincey, Thoreau, Jeffries: Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859), English critic and writer, author of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822); Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), American essayist and poet, author of *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854); Richard Jeffries (1848-87), English naturalist and essayist, author of *The Gamekeeper at Home* (1878), and other books on rural life.

⁹⁷ These Christchurch relatives were on his mother's side; there are some poems about them in *Imperial Vistas, Family Fictions* (2002).

returned. Inland the constant lure of the ranges, striding in and out of cloud, revealing a ridge washed with cold colour till the solidity of the rock went into nothing but a wild and ecstatic play of light, remote, incredible, arrogant and personless, looking down at the shy gullies and the Clarence.⁹⁸

Harvesting is on in the plains, and there are neat bales of hay that look oddly symmetric on the sprawl of the paddocks. It assures me that the natural earth and the natural life is fertile and that this imposed sterility to which we must accord, and with it to active destruction, - this is transigent [sic, transient?] and that sometime we will assume the comparatively good again. Let us look to the day, and determine to make all of it. One must live, then, consciously; aware of everything about us and drawing it into us. Which is not an assertion of the idyllic; that would be obviously false and wilfully wrong. But it is, I think, a creed to be made aware. Too many of us have made a habit of living, rather than a constantly renewed experience.

The family at home continue in their way. There's been no letter for a fortnight, so I read into the non-existent ones that my mother is unable to write. Past knowledge.

Pardon the scrawl of this. I'm writing in bed and am a bit tired. I'll copy you the thing I wrote today and then sleep. These verses are the result of a dream I had last night, and now inarticulate chase after a poem I made in the dream, and of which only one line remained when I woke! The dead moon could have no stench!

This letter should reach you about Christmas. It won't be enough to be conventional and make the usual wishes. After all, I have a certain sense of irony. But I do sincerely wish you well in the New Year.

Yours,
Ken.

⁹⁸ Clarence: river on east coast of South Island, north of Kaikoura.

13. Handwritten, 6pp.

Sunday 7th May [1944]
Auckland⁹⁹

My dear Gray,

Pardon the stationery but I'm on duty. The paper is better quality than most stuff you can get today anyway, so ignore the associations of Form 20 and proceed to the substance of this.¹⁰⁰

Not that there is much or will be much today to this as all my letters. The poet may give his airy nothings their local habitation,¹⁰¹ but you can scarcely make a letter out of nothing, and in this last dismal category I must put all my doings or not-doings, for nothing I do and I'm virtually surrounded by a vacuum so far as the import of my actions goes. A noisy vacuum admitted but as sterile as all vacuums. Nothing with any suggestion of value or profit comes out of it unless there is value in preserving the lives of our citizens in the essential industries and the stately homes of suburbia as I'm alleged to be doing. It shall not be I who strikes a blow in anger against another citizen of the world. My hide shall be unscarred except for corns on my arse induced by prolonged sitting. This is a very stale promontory, and no one like any angel moves on it. We have, admitted, the god-like bearing of our superior officers, and have from their lips wisdom such as Olympus never knew but this is poor fare and I for one would never feed on it and thrive. There is a great coming and going but this citizen stays quietly removed from it, involved in as little as possible, remote and wrapped in vapid thought, dreaming of the beauties of Auckland, and not of those alone who move about its streets.

Recently one of your letters remembered a thing or two about the places, the florists in Customs Street, and the Speckled Cockatoo or Rheumatic Dragon in Vulcan Lane. They're still there. Auckland hasn't changed since you saw it last except that its speech has lost the old purity and we grow rapidly bilingual, though I confess that I can't follow all the dialects of our gallant allies.¹⁰²

The place is ridiculous in its attitudes to Yanks. It is an attitude of parts, ranges from the bloody fool (or wisely commercial?) attitude of the girls who see through a screen of celluloid a strangely transmuted Adonis bearing gifts. And against this adulation you have the anti-Yanks, who see no virtue in any of them, and put their own miserable selves on a dung spattered pillar of righteousness whence they shall come to judge the wolves and harlots—whose latter company I prefer. The sane ones—may I include me?—see them for what they are and select in the way we select from our bourgeois populace.

Which has wandered round Auckland and not round its streets as I intended. You can still smell flowers and earth and clean air in Customs Street, and Maclure

⁹⁹ KS transferred from Woodbourne to Ardmore, near Auckland, 7 January 1944. GP notes: "This is the letter which appeared in edited version in *Journal of Auckland Historical Soc.*, Nov. 2002, and dated as May 1943 (my error). It contains the only reference that I'm aware of where reference is made to the family's brief stay in Liverpool St."

¹⁰⁰ KS was using the reverse side of a 'Voucher for Articles handed into Store for Safe Custody'

¹⁰¹ Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, V i

¹⁰² Our gallant allies: since Pearl Harbour many American servicemen were sent to New Zealand for rest and recreation; their presence had an enormous social impact.

still smells of sausages and sets out his bulletins. And after Queen St., when the petrol soaks the air, you can still go down by the launch steps and take all you want of that queer mixture of sea and pitch and the waterfront. The ferries run, and Cleopatra rides between Devonport and Takapuna with music amidships, which is after all, not so far from the prow. And in a quiet arbor in the Domain the Valkyrie rides and the loquats ripen down the hill.¹⁰³

A fortnight or so back I had to go into town on Sunday morning and I thought of you. I left the tram at the Farmers just as the rain started, very light and delicate but penetrating. I stood at the side door, the last under the verandah across from the car park and looked out over markets and the harbour to Northcote, with the squall blowing across Shoal Bay, and the bells starting in St. Pat's and St Mathew's [sic], coming down benignly, not too solemn, very pleasant and drowsy as if the churches were sleeping in their formalism. The air was fresh and the streets were clean, and while I waited the clouds broke over the shore, coming blue with that emphatic washed blue of all its purity of colour you know, and one by one, in different streets, on different heights on the hillsides, the houses across the harbour stood up into the sun until everything sparkled and moved. I went down past the I.M.B. to the Kauri Timber [Co.], and eventually round to the Western Wharf.

The old 'Lyttleton' [sic] is lying against the wharf. Subritzky's have bought her and are cleaning her up to make a houseboat of her.¹⁰⁴ She is decrepit now with her wood-work unpainted and battered, but she's sound. The pool had the usual quota of scows launches etc. and a sizeable schooner.

The markets were quiet that morning and deserted. I walked straight back to town and took a tram.

Those queer little shops around the place are pretty much the same, God only knows how. The antique shop in Upper Queen St. carries on, and the record shop next door with records no one will ever buy. The junk in the window never seems to change, yet presumably it does. But year after year there's the same plate with the rosary beads looped in front of it and the fake Chinese vases and the poor furniture and the desolate dull oil-paintings to which some peculiar [credence] is given since the note says 'Genuine oil painting'. Who will ever pay money for oils alone? The pictures are drearily bad and dull. The junk shop near the Town Hall has closed down or gone elsewhere and no cat sits at the door now. The trams go up past the Y.W. [C.A.] and I've looked at the names along the narrow street that curves up into Liverpool St. I haven't been there for years. The memory is enough for me.¹⁰⁵

Alongside Parkinsons marble works in Symonds St a little shop is full of man's destiny, rooted in prophesy, and offers anyone who cares the key to the ages of British Israel, the past explained the future determined, and Armageddon predicted in phrases just a little bit clearer than the windows of the prophet. Neither the future nor the past is bright.

Over the hill, going by the Grafton Library is a small plumbers and in it that most glorious of all porcelain thrones, a sufficient glory for any honest lavatory, not as exotic as those recorded in Reginald Reynolds Cleanliness and Godliness—

¹⁰³ *Fountain of the Valkyries* a sculpture by Gilbert Bayes (1872-1953), is located in the Auckland Domain, donated by R S Hellaby in about 1929-30.

¹⁰⁴ Subritzky's: well known Auckland shipping company.

¹⁰⁵ The Smithymans lived briefly in Liverpool Street when they first arrived in Auckland.

an excellent book¹⁰⁶—but fine enough for me, for I could squat in simple pleasure above the dazzling butterflies and blossoms of its bowl. Come hail, come rain, you could always have a pastoral scene in the home, and a scene complete with private water, riparian rights of a particular sort. Do you know the shop? Do you know the bowl? You shall see it in my home and I promise you, you may enjoy its peculiar privilege.

They are good things to see, the little shops of our Auckland. Earth has not anything to show more fair.¹⁰⁷ They are full of the essential pathos and humour of our humanity, and it is a sadness and comedy a department store can never have. What would Court's know of the life in Kitchener St. with the shop painted green, curtains in a window that is more a window than a shop front, where heavy old plates squat in the sun falling across from Bowen St., and the card in the window invites people to knock and enter? Or what does the Herald remember of Ronald Holloway's print shop next door,¹⁰⁸ with the old hand-printed Bible in the Latin, pulled from the Press when Charles was misshaping the affairs of England and Cromwell was a squire? Or the Christian Science shop where I learnt electricity was not one of the vital fluids, and that those who keep error from their minds are safe from sin, its wages, constipation, chilblains or the pox?

The back streets are truer than Queen St. The big shops are false, the unassimilated horrors of our way of living, based on a pretence and condoned by us in denial of respect for natural values. You could meet Dr Johnson in Courthouse Lane and call him brother, and Blake could talk with the Lamb of God outside the locksmith's whose name is Hyauison. We are still human and heirs to the past while there is dust in Albert St and the plane leaves are stowed in gutters before the University. Somehow these things will be preserved, and some will go. There will be a time when there is order in the yards around Parnell Rise, and decent houses in Nelson Street. The rain will fall then and the sun will wash over and we may, in some measure, have come into our heritage.

I've no gossip except this tattle about the city. It may help to keep you out of the war a moment or two and turn back your exile.

All my good wishes,

Ken

¹⁰⁶ Reginald Arthur Reynolds (1905-1958) was an English left wing writer; his *Cleanliness and Godliness : or The Further Metamorphosis. A discussion of the problems of sanitation raised by Sir John Harington*, etc was published in 1943.

¹⁰⁷ Wordsworth, 'Upon Westminster Bridge'.

¹⁰⁸ Site of the Unicorn Press, run by Ron Holloway and Robert Lowry, later replaced by Holloway's Griffin Press.

14. Handwritten, 3pp.

14 Boscawen St.
Point Chevalier

Sunday 16th July [1944]

My dear Gray,

Pardon this silence. I'm no good for writing these days, too bloody stale and flat, and all run-out. The family are poorly, mother progressively worse, and the old man intermittently sick. Myself, going steadily crazier and duller in the service monotony.

Bob Lowry is home. I went out to his place last night and came home this morning determining to write this, looking around for things to tell you. I've no suburban gossip so must give you the city again. It was the sort of thing I used to want. In a way it's a reassurance of some value, more or less constant to you, the value of the commonplace which is sanity—that is, if we are to postulate peace as being sane and war an hysterical condition in our society. Not fully valid as a basis of reckoning but something is needed, if only an approximation to standard. We can never have total sanity in the present system; we have never had more than approximate communal reasonableness, only maladjustment, appeasement at best, at worst despair generation by generation. Yet that is our background, and for all its fault, deficiency and defect both. It gives us our relief, not sovereign but something to attain out of your and my service restrictions.

The fog was about this morning, walking on the harbour. From Grafton Bridge I looked down Anzac Avenue and saw the tower of St. Andrew's standing solidly out on a neutral swirl, so you could not tell where there was water or where only the mass of the fog. The tower was worth seeing! It is one of our few buildings, St Andrew's on Constitution Hill, one in harmony giving and taking something in its position. It's almost elegant, - do you agree? in the eighteenth century meaning.¹⁰⁹

The trees along Symonds St. were bare and black, the winter blackness of these pale early mornings, as if they had been fired and could have no resurrection. They are in a cemetery, but they don't mourn. Beyond them is the red scramble of houses going out along the Newton gully, not changing, still dingy and inadequate and certainly never to have resurrection. Yet there is value in them, potential more than positive. I must go to the Domain this week and look at the trees there stripped for winter's imperious love bed. It is their cleanness and potency we want in us and won't get. Their stimulus and their power—their adequacy? Is that what I want to say?

The Princes St planes are brushed up now with that late afternoon bronze and purple that you saw from the library at school. I sat there—how many

¹⁰⁹ St Andrew's First Presbyterian Church, on the corner of Symonds Street and Alten Road, was built in 1850, designed by Walter Robinson; the tower, portico and gallery were added in 1882, designed by Matthew Henderson; the church was restored in 2001.

years ago?—as you would have done and saw the drops of rain sliding brilliantly down the tram wires and the tangle of colour beyond.¹¹⁰

Coming along Surrey Crescent I had one of those flashes that give you the spirit of the town, so that suddenly you see familiarity as something strange and excitingly new—houses at Owairaka¹¹¹ or Sandringham getting a blaze of sun, weak but emphatic while all the suburbs round were brooding and shivering under the grey. And then the Point laid out like an architect's model—miniature and distant and as if I had been away and was now returning to something remembered out of exile. The ranges were under the clouds, the shape of Te Atatu calm, everything waiting. But what are they waiting for? I feel alien here whence I must be unsettled. The Germans had dark gods in their forests but we have only shadows. The gods won't walk here.

I send *New Writing 3* with this and the family's good wishes.¹¹²
The coffee is boiling for you. Be good.

Ken.

¹¹⁰ Both KS and GP attended Seddon Memorial Technical College from 1935 to 1937 (KS also in 1938-39); the school in Wellesley Street was founded in 1895 (as Auckland Technical School), changed its name to Seddon Memorial Technical College in 1912, and eventually (in 1962) the building became the Auckland Institute of Technology, and subsequently Auckland University of Technology; the School later moved to Western Springs.

¹¹¹ Also known as Mount Albert.

¹¹² *New Zealand New Writing 3*, containing KS's first published poems, "Prelude" and "Walk past those houses on a Sunday morning", was published in June 1944.

15. Typewritten, 1p.

Point Chevalier

Saturday night 6th January [1945]¹¹³

My dear Gray,

I am writing this in my room, the verandah door open against the evening—it is still light outside and very still—having made my self comfortable on an old mattress piled in the corner by my table and bolstered up with a couple of cushions. The farce of this embarkation training has begun today; elements of the rifle, machine gun etc. The necessary futilities of our life.

I feel as if I have been here too long. I've not been good at waiting at any time as you know and I would rather have gone sooner than hang around in the fashion of the last few weeks than have had this dragging that saps one so desperately, this awkwardness of waiting and being unable to do anything or make any start since everything is qualified by the nameless place and the dates of our future. I went out on the train a day before time having misread the leave pass. And then returned again yesterday. I realised once more today that I am now more at ease back in camp than I am at home. One can largely put aside responsibilities in the anonymity. Things seem there to happen through a veil; their importance is transmuted, somehow modified to the impersonal. It is something civilians cannot understand. There is a definite gap between us who have seen service, even in degrees, and the total civilian. They, outside us, may have sympathy but they cant understand.

But I regret this waste of time as you know. Particularly now. Not that I regret this going away. I want to go. I feel that otherwise I would be cut off from experience that is so big a part of the life of the people of this country, of friends like yourself whom I have grown with and if there is anything in me as a writer, I must know what that experience is. It is now necessary.

The particular awkwardness of the moment I cant avoid. The writing comes first. Two days back I had a letter from Max Harris of the *Angry Penguins* in Australia—you'll remember the Ern Malley business¹¹⁴—and I'll be printed in the next issue.¹¹⁵ I've seen the advance copy of the current issue. The magazine is without doubt the finest that has been printed in this part of the world. It is really good. And I've broken in there. So bloody what?

¹¹³ GP notes: "Awaiting departure overseas." KS transferred to Norfolk Island 23 January 1945.

¹¹⁴ the Ern Malley business: a famous fraud perpetrated on the editor of *Angry Penguins* Max Harris by James McCauley and Harold Stewart who invented a fictitious modernist poet called Ern Malley whose poems, modishly surrealist and obscure, were enthusiastically published in *Angry Penguins* and subsequently became the focus of great controversy among opponents and defenders of modernism; see www.ernmalley.com.

¹¹⁵ "Poem" ("And the singular gull..."), "Sonnet" ("Deep in the unhistoric ice..."), "Sonnet in wartime" ("Not by any especial acts of faith..."), "When August was compelling the broken branch", *Angry Penguins* 1945, pp.103-04. KS also had two poems in *Angry Penguins* for 1946: "Biography of no mean man" and "Double sonnet". *Angry Penguins*, 1946, p. 23

And now Bob tells me that Frank Sargeson wants some mss from me, for possible inclusion in a proposed collection of NZ prose that he is doing.¹¹⁶ Bob showed him some of my stories recently and he's apparently interested.

And then there is the projected book. Which I won't be here to attend to in any way.

Pardon this typing. It is damnable.

Going out in the train the other day I went through all the feeling that you will know. The irritating familiar things alongside the track, the lumber yards, the breweries, the glimpse of the sea and the ranges grey with rain and mist. And the casual glimpse of the main street of the town where I lived practically unchanged since I was a kid. It all seems to be unreal. We have the curse of circumstance on us and everything we touch is somehow tainted. It is hard to find permanent values in the time when we need them most. They are in our memories I suppose. And are those memories illusions? Are we to go always looking back to childhood in search of something to affirm when we should be affirming the evidence of every minute for tangible beauty and health and fertility? Are we still young only to have memory to sustain us?

It is profitless to explore this. When we meet again we will be different people. However you will know that wherever you go my best wishes will follow you and that we will sometime have more fortunate stars to look down on us as we walk and argue. Good luck, Gray, maybe some of the past is worth remembering.

Ken

¹¹⁶ Probably *Speaking for Ourselves*, ed. Frank Sargeson (Caxton Press, 1945); the book was published by Caxton but printed by Lowry at the Pelorus Press; no work by KS was included. Frank Sargeson (1903-82) was the leading New Zealand fiction writer of the period, especially for *A Man and his Wife* (Caxton Press, 1940) and *Thast Summer* (John Lehmann).

16. Typewritten, 5pp.

NZ4215786
AC 1 Smithyman W
Equipment section
RNZAF
APO 356

31st January [1945]¹¹⁷

My dear Gray,

Not so many years ago we had a surfeit of Shelley and neo-Romanticism going on Sundays to look for the Castle of Otranto within the limits of too respectable suburbia.¹¹⁸ If we saw an empty house it meant Poe and thumping hearts under the floor boards. If we saw a genuine stone ruin the meaning was too prosaic as I can think only of St Thomas' and the folly of Selwyn.¹¹⁹ But here I have stone ruins that haven't an atom of religion about them but could, if they still had floors, support more than one restless heart.¹²⁰ The Air Force has landed me where there are ruins, where there was tragedy and possible comedy, where there is still comedy since the administrative centre is itself a ruin today, and where the islanders are all that are left of the ruins of the Bounty crew.¹²¹ The people are alive and in some ways living with the dead whose blood has left them a measure of sorrow that shows in their faces and has given them dignity beyond any you could expect. The past is very much alive here. The convict buildings stand.¹²² Families live in them. Government is run from stone four storey blocks where the plaster is peeling to expose the stones and the windows are broken while the trivialities of officials goes on in rooms below. Kingston, the centre, is mainly a place of stone buildings, a village set just back from the sea on the flat under the low steep hills. The pier is all stone. The Pacific hits against it and sweeps in from a welter on a reef not far out. Off shore is a magnificent barbaric island splashed with wild colour, barren and high and shelter for the bay. A few trees grow there but not in the clumps you find through the valleys and on the farm crests. The pines are straight in the evening when I see them for then I am free from the store.

I walked down to Kingston last night, going on roads that were damnably dusty and like the back roads of the North. The island is much like North Auckland. You have the same valley slopes and chiefly to remind me, many of the grasses are those that grow at home. There are paspalum, rats tail, cocksfoot and prairie. The cows on the hills could very well be grazing at Katui, even to

¹¹⁷ GP notes: "Written after one week on Norfolk Island. Included the poem 'Letter from APO 356 to APO 700.'"

¹¹⁸ *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), by Horace Walpole; the first Gothic novel.

¹¹⁹ Bishop George Selwyn constructed St Thomas's (and the first St Stephens's) church in Auckland of inappropriate materials and it subsequently fell into ruins.

¹²⁰ "Here" is Norfolk Island, which obviously cannot be named for security reasons.

¹²¹ In 1856, the British government attempted to relocate the colony of Bounty mutineers who had settled on Pitcairn Island, against their will, to Norfolk Island. Most of the Pitcairners stayed on Norfolk, but about 22 people found their way back and it is their descendants who live on Pitcairn today. Norfolk boasts about 1000 Bounty descendants today, about half its population.

¹²² Norfolk Island was a penal colony for half a century from 1788.

those meandering at the roadside.¹²³ But Katui doesn't grow bananas over the fences nor have taro in the soggy patches near streams. The valley floor at Kingston is wide. The fences are well back on one side though they follow the road on the other. A tired stream from a well goes down to the sea but doesn't seem to get there. It gave up the idea long ago and rather than waste its water it grows a delicate plant something like grape hyacinth in cluster, but much larger and with open shallow flowers. Like hyacinth the flowers are a heliotrope and the leaves thick and fleshy. Mares in foal stand up to their knees and stare at you just as you stare at them. The boy with me last night mentioned centaurs and as we walked I'd like to think it was a primitive memory stirring. Greece gave the world those centaurs and all the Hellenic culture was built on slave labour. We came round a bluff to stand over the lines of the slave settlement that gave shape to this island.

The sea brought those poor bastards here to the greater glory of the Empire. They must have tried to repudiate the ocean for the sea wall they built has kept its line though weakly along the sand beside the pounce of the breakers. A chain or so back the walls of the old penal settlement are broken by the winds and open to the stock that wanders through where men must have hoped for animal freedom. The jail is totally abandoned. The tops of the walls are clipped by bottle fragments and mean nothing. Don't imagine that this was a small jail. The walls would be about two hundred yards along the bay. They are still impressive. The soil there must now be stained with the hunger of the lives that were clipped within that stretch of stone.

There are houses close to the jail. Two of them have families and the washing on the lines in the yard and the aerial for the radio hitched from a corner of the wall are not right; every one has gone from here and these people cling to the sea front as interlopers when there should be silence and the sea and the wind. A silly attitude to take, I admit, Gray. But I feel that way. The pier sticks out and spray falls over the crane arm back to the run of the salt water across the other side of the paved top and you look beyond the stone of the pier to the stone of the island off-shore or the lovely grim curve of the landward cliffs. All the blood seems to be drained out of the place and you wonder whether the living contest with the dead. And as they live they will be stronger, but will the horror of that past be too much for them sometime and they will breed children in defiance of a power they do not feel and they in turn will breed and the lack of dignity and the rights of the convicts will be too much and some day some one will see it and the knowledge will blind them and they will be called mad? The sea will still be running and the spray will taste salt on their lips and they will not know if it is the sea or tears for compassion.

The houses look at the sea. Glass falls from the frames and cats scuttle up trees when you go near. They are old houses it is almost an impertinence to enter them. A light shows through their window softly as lamplight always shows at evening. The wind touches you and the touch is alien and raw. Back of the flat are the houses of Kingston where people live together maybe because they need company from an alien ocean.

The administrators house is on a knoll apart from the village. The living places straggle towards the tip of the bay to the south; there are I suppose fifteen or so of those houses, some in stone and some in wood. A road goes up into the

¹²³ Katui: settlement near Dargaville in Northland

hills and I can't tell you anything of it or where it leads since I haven't been on it. Across that brown thread of road another wall begins, the wall that covered the administrative centre and the chapel. Both the big buildings are broken and desolate and both are used; at least one is used. I'm not sure of the chapel though it has a bell rampant on the roof top.

The walls cover them from the sea wind though they were raised by grimmer needs. At the corners you find the bulge of towers and they are mullioned—that is, they are slotted for defensive fire—and the gate way is arched, the wood of the gates still solid. Inside the gates is a small crude office. Over the door a notice says emphatically This is NOT the Post Office but there you can carry out most of any business that you would want. On the mass of the verandah of the big place you ask for dignity but in another dingy office you could get only stamps to send letters to the desolate world of the dreary decay of imperialism of which the building is the most complete of symbols. This is fallen imperialism. Men who forgot humanity planned this settlement. The disease appears to linger. Government is perpetuated. It would be easy to turn anarchist here.

Kingston may be all memory but the veins of the highland are throbbing. There we live and from a tent I write this just after sunset. I have been here little more than a week. The months will temper my feeling for the place. It is after all exile from home but it is a place of strange beauty. I like the place and will carry on liking it. To be free of the Air Force is a dream that time will turn to fact. Until then we must take our compensations and exploit them. The gods, it is said, never strike with both hands. So far as service goes I have been luckier than a good many. On a free day I can go where I have been already and find relief there for a while. Last Sunday I sat on the cliff edge above the sheer fall to the sea and the bosun birds¹²⁴ whistled past and the grass was warm and the war and all its bastardry was a long way off.

Having no privacy makes it damn hard to write but the training of the last years is bearing fruit. I can now work while there is an argument and radios. I have finished four thousand words of story that I may expand. And I have more to get on with. The poem I enclose is obviously written for you. It is discursive and rough. I send it as it now stands and trust that you will have it with a measure of time to read and remember. There will be much water under the Meola bridge before we walk the beach again.¹²⁵ I was thinking yesterday of the swans at the Springs and the willows.¹²⁶

Now I'll copy the poem and then browse through Saroyan.¹²⁷ I still find difficult realities significant futilities.

MacCormack [sic] sings Drink to me and the boy in the tent over the way is echoing him softly.¹²⁸ Goodnight, sweet prince.

Ken

LETTER FROM APO 356 TO APO 700

Here men raise monuments, dances are held

¹²⁴ Bosun birds: also known as tropic bird, or marlin-spike, or Phaethontidae

¹²⁵ Meola Road runs between Point Chevalier and Westmere in Auckland; Meola Creek was written about in poetry by Keith Sinclair, another Point Chevalier resident.

¹²⁶ Springs: Western Springs in Auckland, near Point Chevalier.

¹²⁷ William Saroyan (1908-81), American playwright and story writer.

¹²⁸ John McCormack (1884-1945), Irish tenor.

to buy a citizen a wooden leg;
the liquor ration's issued twice a month—
Bond Days they call those Saturdays when
the islanders can be officially drunk for tea.
The pines across the hills are shaped with sun
sharp and symmetric of the evening sky. I write,
Graham, to you from this part hut part tent
where war is now inconsequent except to move
men across spaces and the tides propose
subtle the tap of death on certain occasions
for which no text book ultimately provides.

Here men raise monuments, indifferent shapes
from the prosaic stone to tell of time
of previous war that never came so close
though now the island is a rear objective,
call to the northing plane that seeks the sun
over the strip of beach where convicts died.
The islanders about the roads parading
wander in gigs. Their tired and sweaty horses
pass by a heifer dead in a difficult drain.
The citizens to whom the stone records
a life, a death not in the least important
except as statistic in a foreign world
look glumly to memorial slabs.
Also there is a stone above some rocks
where warders drowned. And these not needed
stand in alleys or lean to the wind from slopes
where very record brushes through the grass
the queer torment so many lives
for which in aggregate you wouldn't give a damn
but which is now
a personal affair that burns steep to the common
heart of all the people, those who have made
more green each solemn valley, who felled their trees
and we the living strangers now involved
walking the floors brushing aside the flags
to lay a hand on the shoulder of their past
thinking of exile, summer and fallen harvest
come from the prodigious south to present duty.

Here men raise monuments. You walk a bay
following lines of sea walls, bathing by rocks
out from a penal settlement to note how time
disposes one searching for reason
in Italy, the other rolled in Pacific surf.
We who have taken tourists pose on sand
are maybe heirs to those whose blood is still
the blood of islanders who starved and cut
shape from the inland valleys to the sea,

the shape of lives were given texture by
monuments of sorrow, deprivation and protest
where the island looks north to summer now
or winter swirls up latitudes and cools
memory but not the remembered man.
For now we share all the Pacific's winds
the great high temper of these lonely hills
thrust from the ocean to be harbour for
the squat bomber passing or the coursing gull?
And you from Italy may turn to stare
on the stripped course of history, on the roads
that class room books recorded but could give
their age no touch of life so it must seem
there is no link between caesar and fascist.
Too much of the past can die and be denied
become irrelevant under the strain of tongues
under those feet that climb familiar paths
intent on picnics or spotting artillery posts.
Where every slope has been so common to
the urgent living or the most casual dead
nothing may be important now that cannot
be termed part of the theme of action, of
your business of destroying to produce.

To islanders in this bland flowing south
what has gone must always be immediate; at least
for us within our own located land
we still put out feelers to test the course
of currents swaying men and women. The hoarse
weave of those streets, the surge of cars by shops
the clamorous trams still cannot quite assure;
our river drowns us flooding us with time
with simple issues and with consequence.

The military makes numbers of its men
yet they remain more men than ciphers, thrown
against the guns, the desert tanks, this air.
Citizens forcing strength upon this soil
worked themselves to be a people born
into new world from hard laws imperative
obscurity. So many hatched beneath
the neutral roof of duties could take heart
by wandering these roads that were set round
duress, divorce, remove from all those dreams
of older streets and skies and older ways.
Their settlement was cruel but they lived.
To some the fathers names are legends in the world:
Adams and Christian are those 'Bounty' names
Which in revolt proved that common humanity
may win over the system that breaks down.

Now composite the islanders live on
bound by their heritage to be in the world
which could ignore them until strategy
spotted their paddocks with its transitory
mask of affairs and garrisons pitched tents
fresh to the sea winds shaded by the pines.
And so I write to you whom distance plans
not total stranger to this place though far
from homes where we projected trips and stunts
we whom small dreams abandoned to more large
not of exploring but of plain return.

17. Typewritten, 3pp.

NZ4215 786
AC I Kendrick Smithyman
Equipment Section RNZAF
NZAPO 356

Friday night 13th April 45

My dear Gray,

Three weeks back your letter came and since then I have planned to answer, planned to do this and that and a little of the planning has been carried out. I have been lazy as you know I can be. I have also been bored and frustrated and generally tired of the way of living, though as active service it has a great deal to commend it. But over everything hangs the stultifying effect of boredom, the monotony of service life and the slow drag of exile from New Zealand at a time when I would most want to be there. The news from home as you would expect is not good. My father has done magnificently (for him) in writing to me but my mother writes seldom and then very little. Dad apparently hopes to get her into hospital again for the nursing that she needs so much and has not been able to get. It is a hellish drag on him. And though I have never been able to do much, even that has gone now and he must rely entirely on the good offices of the neighbours. The old difficulties are in the way; his deafness and sickness, his irritability and the need of rest. For my mother there has not been any let up at all. There is always the pain and the cumulating weakness. You saw that for yourself a while back, and I sit here wasting my time.

For myself there isn't much to say so it will be stretched as far as I can get it. You know generally what the island is like if you ever got my letter. The summer is escaping from the south and the cold settling at home I imagine. Here the guavas are bearing still, growing wild at the roadside and wandering their thin branches over the slopes. The lantana still flowers, bananas ripen and the months drag on. We have been abandoned for weeks by the legendary Pacific weather, been slapped by winds and lost in fogs, our horizons drawn in dull drifting mist and the smudges of trees lying strangely through that screen and then coming out clean and sharp and then again lost. The tents have grown clammy mildewed for the fog didn't bring really cold weather though the night wind could bite as we sat in the paddock watching the films. In the store my leathers have all taken fur on them and then the sun has come back and the days have been sticky and then fog comes back. So we go on, drifting through time and fog and sun and waiting for the return each in our own way, not wanting it particularly and then suddenly being acutely aware of memory and the nearness and the farness of the island in the south. I looked north recently from a point on the north shore, north to the island you know well and beyond that to the twisted blank of the other islands where you sweated. And all I could see was the seaward shadows of rain trailing and smooth blank cloud and then fog turning back here. It is part of our condition.

On that point here I lit my pipe and stared out seaward, there is a stone much eaten by the wind off the rocks below and the bite of salt and a century. It stands for two warders drowned at that spot. Drowned the best part of a century

back, one 26 years old and the other 22 years. So I now, the age of one in a different age can stand and look on the same ocean, aware of its moods that are beyond our chronology, aware of the rocks where the pied birds are blown like scrapped paper, and in a manner know the essentials of his life.

Saturday morning.

The letter was abandoned last night for a drifting argument on literature with one of the boys. This morning it will be interrupted for intervals of washing; my clothes are stewing in tins outside the tent. I have a pathetic faith in washing by this habit of soaking. The main defence of the habit is its ease. Its effectiveness I ignore. I'm no housewife and bloody sure no laundrymaid. No domestics for me.

The writing has kept on sporadically and even with more result than when at home. The interference of camp life has been circumvented to a degree and every so often I haul my finger out and get away a story or two. I sent one story to Frank Sargeson and had a mild word of encouragement from him and once in a while have a note from Bob Lowry. The last from him said he would be starting printing shortly, which means any time with him dependent on finance and energy, and expects to be sending me proofs shortly. He is going to bring out a bunch of stories first and later some of the poems.¹²⁹ The possible profit from one may cover the certain deficit from the other. I sold an Air Force story to Korero and may send them another.¹³⁰ Angry Penguins haven't printed the bunch yet which they took last year but have asked for more (which they got smartly) but I should have more words from them within a week or two. Unlike the Progressive they respond to things. I still haven't had an answer from that bunch of Wellington bastards. They can get stuffed for me. Even if they do pay relatively well they can still get stuffed. Rex Fairburn has some poems that he may use in Arts in NZ but they're free.¹³¹ I am getting commercial minded. One of these days I'll start on my threatened murder story and then my soul will be damned.

Keep your eyes open for me. I may want all your description of the local scene someday. It's a pity Hemingway beat me to the Italian scene.¹³²

There is damnable little to tell of anything here. Short of a tourist pamphlet, there is nothing. We have monotony and nothing more. I don't even bother to drink all my weekly beer. A bad state of things.

Tomorrow night there should be a musical recital of ballet stuff. The AEWs sponsor it.¹³³ The programs so far as I can see are made up of rejects from the NBS for which small and scratchy mercies we are duly humble. Only once since being here have I heard anything worth while and that was the Swan of Tuonola [sic].¹³⁴ But praise God we have a fine library and I profit by that, getting a deal of reading done that I should have done earlier and working happily through several

¹²⁹ Neither of these projects eventuated, though Lowry did print and publish (with help from KS), Smithyman's *Seven Sonnets* in 1946.

¹³⁰ *Korero*, a monthly periodical published by the Government printer and issued by the New Zealand Army Education Welfare Service in 1944-45; KS' story "The Raft" appeared in v.2 no.5, 1944, pp. 22-25; no other work by him was published in *Korero*.

¹³¹ *Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand* began publishing in 1945 with a poetry section edited by Fairburn; KS was included in the second number, 1946, and in all subsequent numbers (there were seven yearbooks in all).

¹³² Especially in his novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).

¹³³ Possibly Air Expeditionary Wing.

¹³⁴ Swan of Tuonola: tone poem by Jean Sibelius (1865-1957).

classics to get some fashion of education. I feel that I profit more from that than I would from doing extra mural degree which I am going to leave till the dim days of after the war. This last week I have read Flauberts Bovary and Salamambo and now am doggedly plugging at Proust.¹³⁵ Characteristic maybe but I start in the middle of the Remembrance of Things Past and will be entertained by the mans interminable sentences if the opening of Swanns Way, a juicy interlude of sodomy, is any prospect.¹³⁶

But I miss the evenings of Auckland, the talk that you could get there. I am afraid that I may go rusty as far as critical thought goes for there really aren't any minds here to sharpen mine on. Too seldom I sit and talk to some point on anything more than highly elaborated sex and plain bitching.

However we will have something left to go back to though we will have to learn again to listen to music and to give full value to the values by which we live, to poetry and music and art. After these years it will all have to be relearnt. It is, for us, reshaping realities after the arbitrary realities of the services, the abnegation and denial of the past which we wont be able to deny totally. And I am scared that the values of that post war community aren't going to be too pleasant. Crying wolf maybe, but I really think that things will be sticky, not only economically but socially and it will be necessary to fight like hell to assert the values that matter most to us.

And that is enough prophesy [sic] for the moment.

Sunday 15th

Once more to this in hopes of getting it finished or at least in sufficient shape to get away tomorrow. So to this I'll add a poem or two to amuse you in the Italian wilds and then commend myself to the music recital scheduled for tonight.

Your note on poets ignoring the islands seems to be reasonable. Anticipating this idea—Rupert Brooke got in a lot earlier anyway¹³⁷—I wrote these soon after I came here. Lately I've done too much prose to bother much with verse. I'm lacking a theme anyway and the chance to work undisturbed.

The European war may be finished when you get this. I sincerely hope it will be done and that you will not be too long getting back to the mediocrity of Auckland and the familiar streets. For that, and for what they are worth, I send you as ever my best wishes and a Salud: that being the only greeting that I know that in this time of duplicity stood sincerely for a decent program and the best of common endeavour. Naturally, it was the cry of defeat measured by one term, and of victory that mattered if you care to measure it by the hard and enduring values of our future.

Good luck, Gray.

Yours,

Ken

¹³⁵ Gustave Flaubert (1821-80), French novelist, author of *Madame Bovary* (1857), *Salamambo* (1862), and other books.

¹³⁶ Marcel Proust (1871-1922), author of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, in thirteen volumes, translated into English as *Remembrance of Things Past*; *Swann's Way* (1913) was the first volume.

¹³⁷ Rupert Brooke (1887-1915), English poet, visited Tahiti and other Pacific islands during recuperation from an emotional breakdown in 1913.

18. Typewritten, 5pp.

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Sunday morning 29th April 1945

My dear Gray,

I have brooded on your letter since it came about a week back; that is, on your serial letter. The two instalments arrived at the same time, one of the minor wonders of this year. So now considering all things I sit in the sun as it leans through the open front of the tent and think of you and of Italy and of home, of the permanent things in our lives and of the transient and of the people to whom the permanent have been seen through the dark glass of this reality of war and been distorted so far that permanence has been lost and they, those friends have lived in an abiding present which has nothing to offer them as they had nothing to offer but their lives. You can come only to doubtful conclusions by such thought. Our generation has been fed on doubt. Only the fool had certainty. And there are such degrees of folly that certainty was lost under the curt pressure of reality, of economics and emotion. Now it is important that we should be certain, firstly sure of ourselves and reconciled to ourselves and then of the community in which we are bound and of the establishment of positive values and attitudes in that community. You'll notice I say 'should be certain' because I doubt if we will. We have grown on cynicism since the man who has expected the worst was not often disappointed. Our time after all was supreme with duplicity and oppression and denial and potential good always frustrate. But out of the cynicism and the sophistry of those we knew who were cynics, but not from reason, and were sophists, and didn't know they were, I think we have seen the growth almost independent of their personalities of qualities that can give hope for us as there always has been hope in however [sic] and acute condition of our people. Not that hope has ever come to much. But I say this, being aware, that if from the sophistry we can have the incidental heroics (isn't the term justified, in virtue of the tragic nature of present circumstance?), that we can have the wilful eclipse of personality in violent death, then equally we can look for such denial directed to a positive end. That end for me is the reconstitution of our community, the ending of sickness and the beginning of health.

But what if that wilful movement to violence is the extreme of individualism, the total negation of self as a semi-autonomous being in the great web of social relations by the act of violent death? What if my argument leads me to conclude that we can show strength only by positively looking for death since there is nothing positive in living: That our society is rampant with the disease of history, the wish to die: That we can be reconciled to ourselves only by action, and that action at once impersonal and supremely personal, that the only productive motive for acting must be amoral and unethical, and in the ultimate, blind and arid. Will we be always blocked by the dark glass of history and irrevocably qualified by the past, responsive only to the present when we move to cut ourselves free of time and shatter the glass by bursting into death? So again I am without a

conclusion. The troubles of our community are in the individual. To heal all we must heal each one and the process of that healing is always blocked since any action presupposes a good condition, a pendulum swing between acting and suffering, with the action no action and the suffering the total agent, since the good condition in the community must be there to give a mechanism for the individual to be bettered and the individual must be sound before such a condition can be attained in the community. We are defeated by ourselves before we start. We were defeated before born. And we sown [sic] the seeds of disaster when we [were] not aware as we could never be aware, ignorance being essential in us. To be otherwise would be 'to reach a degree of self consciousness of which mankind has never been capable, and of which, if attained, it might perish.' That is Eliot, saying not quite what I want to say.¹³⁸

The prospect as I see it is damnably grim. I am not a prophet huddling my abstractions round my neck in an aloof retreat. I am very much involved in this, thinking of these things on a fine Sunday morning when the camp is relatively quiet, when the shadows seep through the trembling veil of the lantana and the pines on the skyline stand straight and metrical and still. We are in the community, a specialised community and whatever is done to me is done to you, we are both yet individuals and two of the same kind. I am concerned with this abstract of individualism because the character of that contract is my character as it is yours and or every one we meet and those we shall never meet since we are of consequence to the people of tomorrow just as the dead are important to us now. Remember Donnes phrase...I am involved in mankind?¹³⁹ Mankind is a timeless term useless to the sociologist since it is a referent without bearings but it is an important term to us in the mesh of being where the stream of time drowns us and the past and the future and the hypothetical 'now' are all significant words, but not more than words. Mankind takes in every aspect of time and place.

So, Gray, speaking to you I hope I speak for you as well as for myself. Your letter I think is to blame for this discourse. Or perhaps it was the mixing of beer and rum last night that left nothing this morning but a curious feeling of suspension and makes it hard to write this letter when I could easily sit and watch the clouds drifting and let the sun claim me. Responding to that letter I think as you have the thought of the past, the relevant past of the past of the last few years and the total of the things seen and done in New Zealand since they have been important to us and of them, out of our considerations of them we can assess ourselves as we stand in relation to that country. It is a good place. It is lovely and harsh and raw in my north. It is bleak in the guts when you look from the dark of carriage on the main Trunk and see the cold loom of the hills and the random lights of Waiouru.¹⁴⁰ You may hear the morepork; is there anything more tuned to the night than that melancholy calling coming out of the trees when you hear as well the stir of cattle or the faint coastal mutter of the surf? We have seen the night over all the islands. We have smelt the night wind and watched moonlight

¹³⁸ The quotation is from T.S. Eliot's Preface to *A Little Book of Modern Verse*, chosen by Anne Ridler, Faber & Faber, 1941 (thanks to Jennifer Sturm for this reference).

¹³⁹ John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, Meditation XVII: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee".

¹⁴⁰ Waiouru: army camp on the Desert Road in the central North Island.

flooding down across the running farms and the steep bend of rivers. Or have known the friendly tang of salt on our lips and the roughness of lava under our feet coming back with pippies [sic] from the reef with all the mudflats and the afternoon before us and the thin blue haze lay on the Ranges and the swings in the Reserve squealed and the couples lay together at the edge of the grass.¹⁴¹ We have been made by such things as we have been made by an old photograph found in the tin box in the front room and knowing that this was Grandfather have wondered just what the hell he was like and if the austere and I think lovely face of my grandmother was lifted to his in more than duty.¹⁴² And we have been in love, distantly and shyly and later emphatically have thought Jesus what did I see in her and known again that we are strangers to ourselves and have maybe only the common factor of a constant name to bind us to the boy who was then going to school, detesting maths, depressed by French and queerly quickened by words on paper and excited until the use of words was very important. And we have fallen in love again and called it off because we were going into the Army and didn't want to have any entanglements when and if the Army claimed us properly (as it did.) And we have been about places and heard gunfire and watched the blight of uniforms settle on quiet paddocks and seen tanks parked in the cool shadows of hedges and watched a long trail of lorries and cars and guns come down a highway out of low hills and go away to manoeuvres. We have known sweat in the darkness of a strange room and whispered in a double bed and heard outside and all around the tap of time. Everything has been qualified by time. We have grown up and gone about and done this and that and have had friends and said So long to them and wondered and found the answer in the paper a year or so later and felt bad about their deaths for a while and then largely accepted them as inevitable but still remembered the waste. We have been made from love and despair and casual things and things with sudden and surprising importance.

Just now as I wrote one of the boys came in and asked me to give him the words of Masons On the Swag.¹⁴³ So I typed them and one or two more of Masons verses and lay back trying to think exactly of the words when Chris came running in and told us that Frisco had announced the surrender of the Germans and I said Jesus and thought Now what the hell is that next line. The report may be abortive as the report of 9th November 1918 when there was a false armistice announcement. We know so little. What is happening to you as I write? What is happening in Germany? Outside the tent and outside the camp the island is quiet. A rooster crows persistently and the heat of the afternoon walls in the gullies and the hills. This may be peace. So what?

I went into camp December 1st in 41. For two months I was out with a broken hand. The rest of the time, here and there. You came to Hopu Hopu while I was there. I remember that and the stillness sometimes at night, just at Lights Out with the bugler of the Mounted Rifles blowing the Post, the chords coming slowly and clearly down the lines and you could feel the sleep of the men in that camp settling on the canvas. The heel smack of marching men on the roads, the most deadly sound I know, the insistent smack of boots going down together. You have

¹⁴¹ At the end of Point Chevalier, close to Boscawen Street, where KS lived, is a Reserve including a children's playground.

¹⁴² KS subsequently wrote at length about his paternal grandparents in the posthumously published *Imperial Vistas Family Fictions*, (Auckland University Press, 2002), see also *Collected Poems 1943-1995*, www.smithymanonline.auckland.ac.nz.

¹⁴³ R.A.K.Mason's "On the Swag" was included in his book *No New Thing* (Spearhead, 1934).

asked Why these things, the casual sights, the casual doings. In them there is the value of our living when we have come most truly to patriotism, into loving the country and the way of it and its potential. I had that feeling one evening at Te Kauwhata, looking out over the swamps to the strip of the Waikato where we had bathed probably late that afternoon, looking that night coastwards over the swamp country we were marking for war and finding then inexplicably and most movingly the great natural affection for that country and for all that was unseen. And deciding then that maybe the land and the people taken together were worth while. What have we seen? What were the things that matter?

There was the flat calm, a cold calm of early morning when I first landed at Nelson and saw half clear the long line of the Boulder Bank, the lighthouse and the mute gulls blowing far away over the bay. The steel morning and the cold, the wooden quiet of the wharf and the splatter of houses up the cliffs.¹⁴⁴ There was calm water in Tory Channel and a diving porpoise and the dry hills steep up from the sea and the split rocks at the open water and black specks of mutton birds low down on the break of the waves. There were the green waves and Terawhiti and a long clean vista from Paekakariki with the hump of Kapiti marking the ends of Ivan Cummins short and not notable life.¹⁴⁵ There were the river beds from Otaki to Shannon and beyond Palmerston and moonlight falling into gorges in the King Country and following us down the spiral and into morning with men waving from cow bails when you looked with tired eyes at them and thought of the smell of cow dung and the sharp tang of piss (Why do cows wait till they get in the bail?) and the warmth of cows. I have seen the tricorne of Rangitoto from the top of the hill behind Bombay and driven to another hill to look down on the Hauraki, on the plains and the gray swamps. The hills from Warkworth leaned back into the North when we moved up there and I felt that I was going home even if it had to be the flat of Waipu and then found it better drawing over the clay roads, as ever, badly rutted down to the amazing spread of the blue water and the islands of the Bay and the quiet of the waterfront at Paihia. I saw the tents of the troop from the Russell wharf when those tents stood out triangular and even on the night. And one night I lay on the wharf waiting for the Knoxie¹⁴⁶ to come back on the last trip and there was a line storm running inland to Kawakawa and further out of sight, fork lightning tapping on the hills and thunder rolling. They were all important.¹⁴⁷ I want to go back to them. They are positive. There were the trains, the stuffy carriages and the bodies on the floor and in the racks and the scratch of a match in the dark and the dismal pound of the rails. One evening we were going south on a leave train from Auckland, drawing out through Westfield as the sun set and the mud flats were alight and golden and the gulls sat at the ends of exposed pipe lines. In one carriage ahead some one started Old Mother Hubbard and the song came back through the train till the whole train was singing and you could hear, on the curve there between the South Road and the mudflat, the tune coming from carriage after carriage. By such tokens we live. We were waiting then for something that didn't come, for the Tokyo Express and the scab of war on the north.

¹⁴⁴ See the poem "The Bay 1942", published in *Inheritance* (1962).

¹⁴⁵ Ivan Cummins was a student at Seddon Memorial Technical College during the same era as KS.

¹⁴⁶ Knoxie: name of Fuller's cream launch in the Bay of Islands.

¹⁴⁷ The places mentioned were all seen by KS in his movements around New Zealand during his military career from the Bay of Islands to Marlborough.

We are compound from such things. To us now in exile, there must always be pleasure and sadness in the naming of names. They are our music. We in part have made those places as we have made places we have never been. We are involved. Peace means those places and their fertility, not that fertility of producing alone but the fertility of being able to give us what we would ask and give always in good measure. They are our testament.

Summer is escaping now from the south. I have heard that there have been heavy frosts at home. We had frosts while I was at Pokeno.¹⁴⁸ Morning after morning it was hard to get up from the blankets and sometimes hard to sleep with the cold. But coming out into the morning was cold, with your breath steaming and hanging at the door of the tent, the air stiff with the cold and the trees stiff and down the roll from the camp and out along the flat under the shadow of the hills, all the paddocks were crisp with white frost, the grass greens lost under that white elegance and a weave of shadows from branches and hedges spread out over the white.

These have been the material of our ways of living. There have also been those queer changes of tempo in people you know. There have been the sudden strokes that showed the unhappiness of people you knew, unhappiness maybe you never suspected and you have been concerned for them. There has been the shadow of the force of our time over us, a malignant shadow and we have walked towards a tomorrow that has been cast down by that shadow and the fever of our day has run through us and we have been wild and impotent and angry and afraid. Now they say that the European war is over. An ending and a beginning.

Last week I climbed the local peak and looked all round the island, seeing it much darker than I had thought. I met a gallant finch on the road, splendid with black back, a white triangular mask and a superb scarlet front which he ruffled at me when his wife came down close to flirt with me. And she was so plain after his honour in the geranium bushes.

I applied the other day for a transfer to public relations, or the Archives section or Korero. Some day I may get out of this store business. Apart from that have done nothing to stir the stagnant pool. Nothing? I have twice been much moved by the moon and the night. Tonight I shall go walking.

Salud, Gray. Look to the night and the moon. It is said that night is a good herdsman. She brings all things home. There is a Sapphic fragment somewhere.

Yours,

Ken

Pardon the errors. I'm too bloody lazy to correct them [handwritten]

¹⁴⁸ Pokeno: rural settlement south of the Bombay Hills near Auckland.

19. Typewritten, 1p.

APO/ 356

Sunday 27th May 45

Dear Gray,

I hunted up the last letter I wrote to you. It was sent on the day of the false Frisco peace announcement. Now the real armistice has come and Mrs Hamiltons husband has been released from his prison camp and I wrote to her the other day.¹⁴⁹ Apart from the feeling she must have and which only she can recognise, I made my own comment that history and war is compounded of the little things, the personal things done to people not in themselves important, that history is the complex of those actions and the suffering of our time is the total suffering of each of us. I wrote better than I knew and now I can repeat that declaration with all sincerity and feel it in full.

My mother died on Friday. It is simple as that. You more than any other will know what it means to Dad and myself. I am worried for him, very worried and want to get home to make some arrangement. I doubt if I will. All arranging will probably have to be done from here. I don't expect now, I just hope for good luck. Luck was left out of our family quota it seems in pretty good measure. You know that the last few years weren't by any way easy for any of the three of us and for my mother least of all. The last letter I had from my father told me that Mum had gone to hospital that she was very weak and much in pain but he was hopeful of the nursing of the hospital. The doctors left it too long. They had the biggest obstacle to fight in her age. She hadn't a great deal left after the operation and she poured that out as she had always poured out her strength. She never seemed to acknowledge that she wasn't young and strong any more until it was too late and then the pain was too much for her. You saw her last year when she was still fighting back what she must have known with certainty. And we were powerless to do anything more than try and relieve her a little.

God knows how the old man will take it. He isn't strong and he has had the strain of looking after her for three years now. And he is alone. We [were] always just the three of the family. I may have to rely on the people of the neighbourhood for immediate care where he is concerned but there are always those things that should be done by the family.

I have written this since you more than any one I can think of, have known how we lived and what the home was like. Tomorrow is more than ever blank. I feel so damned responsible now for Pop and feel that he is so much alone.

With all my regards and good wishes for your return, or at least for good luck in the new adjustments in your theatre,

As ever,

Ken

¹⁴⁹ The reference is to Ian Hamilton, a conscientious objector who was imprisoned during the war. He wrote a book, *Till Human Voices Wake Us* (1953, 2nd ed. 1984) about his experiences.

20. Typewritten, 4pp.

NZ4215786
AC1 K Smithyman
at APC 356

Sunday morning 24th June [1945]

My dear Gray,

Thanks for the cable and the letter of the 20th May which came a month after posting. Mine are apparently being delayed more than yours. That will be due to my own damn foolishness in not sending them air mail. Blame my perennial absent mindedness for that. It is reasonably active.

Answering your questions: I am getting my father to send you a copy of the current New Writing. I havent a copy of my own yet. The PP are lax as usual but I have seen the fourth issue which prints my Danish Interlude as two poems, with what I think are three textual errors.¹⁵⁰ One is definite. The other two are possibles. As I havent a copy of the original I cant be sure. I may have changed words here and there anyway after I sent in the manuscript in June of last year. Korero has printed a story, based on one a boy told in the hut one night. As for the Angry Penguins – I cant say. I wrote to Max Harris last week for more news. A letter is overdue and at least one copy of the magazine. He has other poems of mine which I sent this year but so far have had no word of what he intends with them.

The fourth New Writing is curious as the others have been. While it has nothing as bad as Woollaston's trifle of nausea in the 3rd issue,¹⁵¹ or prose as bad as Robertson's,¹⁵² the standard is all round lower. Only one effort at all notable in the prose (the prose has always been the weaker feature) and the verse this time not so much in quality as previously. Bad editing is killing the magazine. Decent people wont write for it, I'm beginning to think. Consider the first issue printing Curnow, Fairburn, Sargeson etc. They don't like Gordon and they cant get any satisfaction out of the Progressive. I'm fed up. I still haven't got my papers back that I've demanded five times. Nor any acknowledgement of my letters. It isnt good enough. You may know that the group has apparently been woefully mismanaged, to the point of financial difficulty. You have only to look at their publishings to see the point of that. I think of the trivia that has nothing to do with New Zealand. Barkers translations, Osts work etc.¹⁵³ New Writing is killed on its feet. It never even fought. And Gordon stays in power as editor.

The old Art in New Zealand has been reorganised and is now a much finer effort in format and contributors.¹⁵⁴ Very good criticism in parts, better plates and better verse. Rex Fairburn is active with it, but the main spring is a

¹⁵⁰ "Danish interlude" 1 & 2. *New Zealand New Writing* 4 (1945), 20

¹⁵¹ A poem called "Trees" by the painter M.T. Woollaston.

¹⁵² A prose piece called "Eruption at Tarawera"

¹⁵³ Two volumes of Arthur Barker's translations from French poetry were published in 1943 and 1944; Frederick Ost's translations of Czech poets and essays on Czech poetry were published in 1945.

¹⁵⁴ *Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand*.

bloke I don't know, Howard Wadman in Wellington. Anything to do with art in NZ needs a firm kick in the slats to bring it alive.

When your letter came I was reading it walking back to work from lunch. I was doing a job off the station and had to go down the trailing road so much like a back lane in North Auckland, barring its colour. No metal on the road, but the roadbed a bright brown red quick to come up with dust, and the banks scarred with the footpaths, past the country store and round to my job where I could sit in the sun in intervals and consider your words. I have the letter beside me now and others I have had from you this year and as well the copies of my own so I can see what I have seen, and said this year. And what is there to say now that I have not said before? The war is over and the war goes on. Even in New Zealand, the main importance has been in the European theatre. People have never realised that the front line is a days flight from Auckland and that there are things being done within so slight a distance (and that distance at the same time so great when thought in a personal term) the things of the war that are as real as the tensity [sic] of action in the Italian hills, the cumulative drag of garrison and island sojourn, the conflict for the few, the return to home for some and the persistent qualification of service from which [they? we?] have not escaped and have little prospect of escaping for so long yet. We are an island people. We have the sea round us. We are remote in our understanding. Social response always lags behind our technical facility. So much present difficulty comes from that failure to respond; we persist with a social structure that is far behind the constitution of our time and community and we persist because we have not in ourselves absorbed the technics [sic] with which we are on the surface familiar. And our technics have turned on us as a double edged weapon. We have been forced into violence to assert that by destroying we can build. But our foundation—the same uncertainty, the same lack of basis that commits us to recurring wars? What are we to do? You and I, the little and unimportant units of an age and a generation? That is our main concern. We are committed to history but we still remain individuals and we have problems and values that time will not screen.

One thing is certain. We cannot retire. The community will be walled round us and the community will endure, lasting in flux and always making new adjustments, creating new sanctions and demanding more of us. But we are positive (or will have to be positive) in ourselves. We have to find ourselves and establish ourselves. We must reconcile what is in us. And I don't think we will do that. It has been an argument on which I have worked that we can never be reconciled, that we are more than one person, that we are a complex of personalities in flux, the complex compounded into an active identity, the operable citizen who has hungered and loved and been frustrated and never known what he is or what precisely it is that he wants. We have lived blindly. When our eyes have opened, we have wanted them closed again and we have closed them and substituted dream and illusion by [sic for?] the accusing fact. We have looked in mirrors and broken the mirrors at horror of what we saw and then tried to piece the broken glass together again and make a new truth that would be acceptable. We have known happiness of a sort. But it has been castrated by expediency. We are bound to look for happiness and we are bound to the community. On that basis we always depend. I am most pessimistic now for I see no good in the communities. The potential of our own places I sensed at times will not be realised because of our shifts and divisions. You can test my thought against your own environment.

So we must compromise. And we must affirm. You remind me that I said Are we going to look back to childhood for something to affirm. Basically, no. You know that. But where is our option?

The past is most definitely gone. We cannot live in regressive dreams. But we cannot wholly escape them. We must face our manhood and be adult. We must know what we are facing. It will be compromise between dream and actual. Between the dream of our time and the vision of what is happening. Between responsibilities (most to our self) and commitments (to others?). Between the reality of our community and the fact that in that is our home and the unavoidable nostalgia for a place where we can be at home as I have never been at home in New Zealand. We are colonial. We are both of us, Gray, first generation colonials and we have repudiated the temper of England and are unable to take our natal soil on its own good terms. But we must go home and we must be at home there. If we desire happiness (whatever we understand below any level of language in that term) we must be reconciled to our country and out of that reconciling we must build and be fulfilled. I have key words, token words, but am I really seeing their worth or am I deluding myself with a mysticism that glosses over lack of understanding?

This last month has been long and difficult. I was not able to get back and fix things for Dad as I wanted. But the people at home have been very good, with offers and practical assistance. Especially Peggy and Martyn Finlay who have been most generous and helpful.¹⁵⁵

Home will be strange when I get there. You will know how strong the impress of my mothers personality was on us and the very real way in which the home centred round her. The adjustment the old man must make will be hard. I will have that to do when I get back. The effect of her death was blanketed to a degree by this distance and then again made more emphatic by it. In a way, it has been a month of suspension when I have had this responsibility and been virtually powerless. Now there is the old man who is lonely but seeming to pick up a bit, and there is as well tomorrow when there will be both of us.

That tomorrow is so vague. What will I do after this show is over. Go back to teaching or take another job? Not teaching, I'm afraid though I like the job and would like it. Whatever I do will be subordinate to the writing if I keep on. It is too important to me. I must arrange so that I will be best equipped to get into working order and get something done.

We have been strangely equipped to face the blank of that tomorrow. We were aware of the despair and contriving of the depression; you know just how far we were hit by that and what those years meant. And then we went to school and grew up through those years waiting for a war and shortly we were involved in that. In a sense we had little youth, or the time that should have been was soured by the events that claimed us. Now you have been familiar with violence and an exile from your home. What do you want to do? What can we do?

There is good and richness in the country. There is so much stupidity and culpability to be cleared.

I wrote recently to a friend 'if we need anything and perhaps supremely today, it is charity.' And I repeat that to you, for you will understand the need of that charity and the way by which I have come to make that declaration. It is so obvious and repetitive of what has become traditional. It is the term of Saint Paul

¹⁵⁵ Dr Martyn Finlay was an Auckland lawyer and Member of Parliament, later a Cabinet Minister

who wasn't a fool all the time. We have learned charity I think in the bond to force. We can forgive and love with more depth than we could if this service had missed us. We are not great with charity and because we lack, we will always be lacking the response. I am not concerned with charity in the Paulist sense, but in the sense of the humanists, of such humanists as Confucius. We may not find the terrestrial world enough but it is all we will have. Any attribute of a religion, provided it is not permeated with creed and belief, may do for us so long as it extends to the community some hope of happiness. We have the wrong goals. We assert or seek to assert our one self. That is necessary and imperative. But we must seek to obliterate in the action the great enemy which is the self. To lose our identity? No. To find our identity in the wilful negation, and from that negation to be affirmed and operative. We must be givers and not only takers. We are, but the majority don't realise. We have learned charity I think and to suffer fools (but not gladly) and we have learned to suffer. That is important.

And you intimate with death will have learned to live. In a death ridden city that quality will be valuable. But I have written about that previously and it doesn't need reiteration.

We are lost in winter here. Gales hit at us and time blows over. The valleys are deep and dark with pines and the trees are salted with the near blown spray of the sea. The cliffs are scaled by that spray. I have been out at one point when the wind was sitting in the right quarter and seen the pines wet and dripping under the clouds of spray blown like steam up the face of the rocks and then inland. That was on Victory Day and I remember it, and the sea was great, running in long and free and then bursting on the rocks and scuttling into the boulder beaches at the cliff foot and shooting tall and white over the ridges. Birds we didn't see in the summer have come close to the tents and perch in our orange trees. The oranges are hanging on their branches and peach trees are in blossom. Time or season are confounded and spring and winter are mixed. Sun climbs for a day or two and the gales strike back on us. The peaches bloom and the oranges ripen. This is exile which we do not forget.

The sea will be running high at Kingston today and I may go down to look at it. But Kingston is comfortless. There are too many tangible ghosts and we have enough ghosts in our own time. We are drawn back to their memory, the vortex of our debt that will not be paid.

I have sketched a story about your five prisoners but think that it will be better postponed until I see you again and we can talk of such things. I don't know that I have any verse worth sending you but will scuff among my papers and see. Your command for your amusement.

Be good Gray and watch the sunrise. It may surprise you with a tomorrow that will be worth some word. And some hope, since we [are] destitute of that.

Yours as ever

Ken

21. Typewritten, 4pp.

NZ 4215 786
AC I Kendrick Smithyman
RNZAF
NZ APO 356

Sunday morning, 12th August [1945]

My dear Gray,

This is the end of the war. Or so we have been told. We are living on rumour and half report. We are tantalised with scraps of negotiation going on and the settlement of personal fates in terms of nations. This is the end. As you say, not with a bang but a whimper. This morning there was rain and now the rain has gone and the sun is on the slopes, warmer today than for weeks it seems. Outside the tents where the lantana was cleared yesterday hens and chickens are scratching on the earth. Men sit on steps and take the sun and talk. This is the end of war and the beginning of peace the beginning of the waiting for the return home, the anti climax. Our feeling has gone. We are superfluous here. We are without purpose now. Soldiers in peace are like chimneys in summer. Properly we have not realized that our obligation is on the way out, that we are moving to a new city as civilians. We are moving already. There is change in the habit of thought. It doesn't mean any hilarity. That is played out. It went quickly yesterday. This is half life, the end that isn't quite final (there have not been formalities) and the biting into a stale world, between two worlds. The fowls cackle in the yard down the slope and I am going to lunch.

They say the war is over. No hysterics, no excitement now. Not much at any time. We have been waiting too long. Now we start to wait for the last moves. The long road goes home and back to the mediocrity of the suburbs, to our own unimportance and our own small efforts to make a world that will last from solid bases, enduring bases of ethics and economics if the two can be reconciled. We are not disillusioned for I doubt that we had illusions to lose. We are not desperate. We are only tired and strange to ourselves, to the past before we were in service and to the present since its purpose has been negated and definitely to our future where we must learn to move again and be. To be. Not automatic in responses, aware of what we are doing, listening to music and reading significant words and finding love and pleasure. To translate the world into our own terms, realising the world and ourselves. Will we realise? Will we win anything from time but compromise[?] The political and military war fades, the personal war goes on. We can not evade the present and most certainly we will not dodge the past. We would wish to be inconsequent. For myself, I want to do nothing that will involve other people and I cannot live without that responsibility.

I was woken yesterday morning about three o'clock, some one running down the lines yelling happily and blurred the wars over, and I heard the singing in the messes where the sergeants and officers had got going. So I went to sleep again. If I had waited so long I could wait till morning. There was free beer at eleven in the canteen and a gala afternoon that had been arranged previously and happily coincided with our celebration. And a dance at night. But I got sick of the

gala early in the afternoon and in the evening did little but wander round and go off to bed.

Because this is the end it is the time to look back and see just how we have been in the years. We have been party to waste, of necessary resources in material sense and waste in lives. We have been very good at destroying, very good, since our best minds have gone to perfecting ways of breaking. What was necessary? What could be used[?] The material may be replaced by ingenuity (it has already taken a prodigious forward movement so far as energy has gone with the atomic bomb) but there isn't any ingenuity that can replace the lives of the people we have known. Personally our loss cannot be replaced. The community may replace their number but those friends had their value in a quality of friendship outside their talents and that quality is gone from us. Must we write them off as necessary on the principle of the 'Divinity that shapes our ends', beggaring the meaning of divinity?

It is futile to extend this argument. To argue this way is to presuppose a normative aspect of our community that doesn't and never has existed. Our community and our lives are positive; we are concerned with what is, and not with what should be. There is no should be in the ethical sense. Because of that we may be reconciled to our condition. There have been wars and there has been mass violence through the turbulence of history. It was necessary to destroy and be destroyed in this age as it has been necessary in other ages. It is part of the myth of our time. But there is still the regret for those boys and there are no facile words to cover them. For us, they cannot ever be buried decently. They are accessory to the crime to which we are born. They were guilty and innocent as we. Now we return to the homes and to make ourselves again something we would wish to be. And that will be compromise.

I have a great plan for the future, Gray. I am going to listen to music and write a little and paint a little and earn enough to live and enjoy a bit here and there, and make love a little, pleasantly I hope, and settle in a winter night by the fire. I have my father and the cat. The house—not much admitted but there is a garden and there are trees. The harbour is not far away. We are not too far from the city. There are things to be done and thought. I am going to propagandise for a better community; I shall join the local branch of the LP.¹⁵⁶ I will take beer in company when I feel that way and by myself when I dont. Pop will supervise and I shall garden and from the garden we will take cucumbers and beans and onions and pickle them. And I shall grow parsnips and rhubarbs and such against a plenty of sugar being available and I shall try to make brews of them. Cooking must be learned so I can cook. The carnations must be planted again and the hedges clipped, the fruit trees pruned and the lawns cut. When I want to do those things, with luck the means will be there. To settle and live quietly. Is it a terrific plan? But there is so much qualifying it, the strings of this time which are tied to us and pull us. What I would attempt is an experiment with living, an essentially practical plan. But I am of the least practical. You will see the results at any rate when we are meeting by the gate and will shortly stroll in the park. Tomorrow, the coming closer but still distant.

Looking back over this and my big reminiscent letter to you of three months back I reckon I am making an essentially practical testament of faith. My faith and my planning is in concrete things, in places we have known and actions

¹⁵⁶ Labour Party

we have known. I am trying to be integrated and not distracting myself with esoteric things. Since I have written differently earlier, you may ask What about the writing. But that is as much a way of living as the pickling in the kitchen. It is a part of the plan. It is not an exotic. It is very important, maybe more than anything else. But it is in focus. I am not designating it with high flown bullshit, calling it my ART because it doesn't deserve that. It is way of living I project in concrete terms and you must agree that art in any form is a way of living. It has been put on a pedestal in a latter day Olympus. But its place is in the armchair by the fire or on the beach when you are lazy with summer or in a tram and under the trees of autumn. I know that now. I didn't at one time. But I have written poems in latrines and on ration trucks going into town and on top of a pile of flour sacks and any God knows where. It is part of the day. Most of my free thought goes to it I suppose. It isn't far away for long. And if I learn to pickle onions well—I'm very fond of them—it may be just as important as making a poem. They both have their place in the landscape. I am definitely attracted by this domestic idea. There isn't any Brookes [sic] farm atmosphere intended.¹⁵⁷ It is part of the discovery of the world that I want to make. I don't want to seem any Thoreau. I just want to be left alone to enjoy myself. To be able to say, when I can wear my gents summer suiting without one eye on the Provosts. 'And now good morrow to my waking soul'. Misquote.¹⁵⁸

A testament of faith. And God knows there will be enough vocally looking for some faith. I haven't any patience with them. I wrote furiously to Ngaire recently because she wasn't satisfied with the mortal world.¹⁵⁹ Isn't this with its tragedy and betrayal and poetry and pain and laughter a world enough. We must learn to explore and to accept, to come home with our selves and not be strangers where we have always known.

Your letter from Trieste attracted me, notably your comments on Milan and the Como and Venice. In better circumstances we will talk of those places and I shall try to make stories of them. I have used the Italian scene in the poems you have seen and in a group I think important to me that you will not see till we meet again.¹⁶⁰ They are too long to send you as I would otherwise.

So we are trembling on the verge of a future that has some meaning now other than expediency and patience. Its a queer mood. I'll leave it and copy some work for you to amuse you and distract.

As always I send you my good wishes and fond memories of the casual suburb where we are known and hope that it will not be too long before we can be waiting for the tide and the beach, drinking beer on my back steps and going leisurely to bathe.

Yours, my old and rare,
Ken¹⁶¹

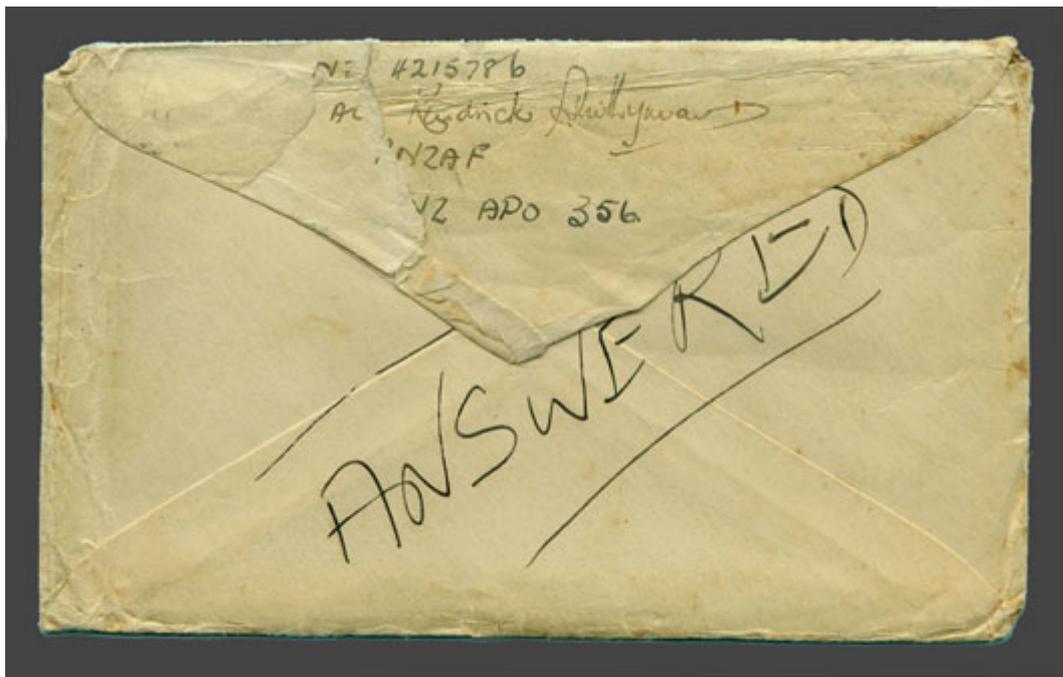
¹⁵⁷ Brook Farm was a Utopian rural community established near Boston, Mass. in 1841 by George Ripley and his wife Sophia Dana Ripley and nine other families; Nathaniel Hawthorne was briefly involved and wrote critically about the community in *The Blithedale Romance* (1851)

¹⁵⁸ From John Donne's "The Good Morrow".

¹⁵⁹ KS' Christchurch cousin.

¹⁶⁰ The reference is possibly to "Partisan Journey", a poem in seven parts with a European setting included in *The Blind Mountain* (Caxton Press, 1950)

¹⁶¹ KS returned to New Zealand 11 September 1945 and was discharged from the Air Force 1 November 1945.





A. F. C. A.

Cambridge Military Camp.

1/10/891

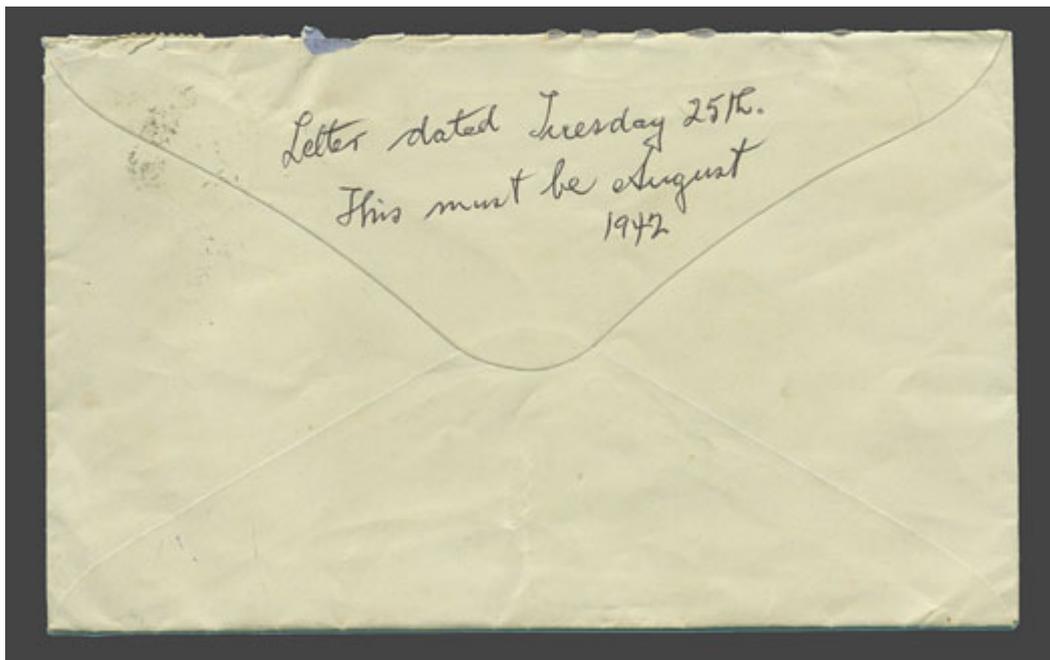
Survey Troop, N.Z.A.
Te Kauhata.

Dear Gray,

Disregard above address as we are due to shift. As soon as that consumes our hearts, for this is the best thing I've struck.

I'm officially storeman of the Troop, in reality quartermaster - roustabout. There are only thirty in the club, one officer and one sergeant. We live like a large scale family, all having more or less common taste. The majority are Varsity boys, and the majority are damned good fellows to work with. Only one bombardier mars our little heaven's galaxy.

For three weeks past we have been out of Te Kauhata, a wandering, semi-independent troop, though drawing our stores there. We are camped a mile from Te Kauhata township, partly in an orchard. The local people have a tradition of magnificent hospitality, open handed with all things.



1
Nate's best those houses in a Sunday morning
with the piano stumbling in the front room
where the mechanic finds some tools takes them
to close his hedges, talk of politics.

Or now along the lake, or down the banks
sit under hills of logs and watch the mangroves
the cliffs, the pottery shards, while distant farms
grow out of fog to sun; for it was here
that paleontologist traces to teach us fate.

Think how the threads were coming close together:
remember the month, the day, the hour and the
ungrainy ~~straggled~~ ^{dragged} off home in the train
and two days after
set in the hot Warkent close to the river
bell tents, new straw and uniforms everywhere.

Leave was a chance to take the ink
and go smelting into the ranges. There were places

not to be seen as before: and places to visit,
a house with oaks where there was one
was quick with sympathy but did not understand.

Remembers all these things: the League ball paraded
across the park
processional the parade of eighteen footers
and a cold palace at five.

Sometimes there is value to them. Like
the piano stumbling
something is cast into being that will
take shape in the end.

—
You'll appreciate the spirit of this — and some of
the scenes? It's for Roschaw's film!