

Montréal, 03 November 2012

*AF, IHE, SK, JL, TLM, PPP, GP, LR, LS, WCW for SK*





Observatory on the top of Mt. Joe, 900 feet above sea level,  
affording a beautiful view of the country.  
Valley Forge Park, Penna.



The front of the postcard, vertical in orientation, is mostly made up of one black and white photograph. The central focus of the photograph is an open-structure tower with a square base that tapers slightly toward the top. Two opposing corners of the tower align nearly perfectly with the centre of the image. From the base of the corner right of centre, a staircase ascends within the structure, through seven 90° turns, to an observation deck. There is a weather vane at the tower's peak.

A gravel pad surrounds the structure, connecting to a roadway that curves toward the base of the image. At the edge of the gravel pad, behind the tower, is a bank of trees. Two trees are also visible at the front of the image—on its left and right sides, framing the observation tower within a patch of seemingly clear sky that appears in the photograph as a light, even grey.

A caption on the bottom of the postcard, with black text on a white, rectangular ground, reads: "Observatory on the top of Mt. Joy, 500 feet above sea level, affording a beautiful view of the country. Valley Forge Park, Penna. / No. 17." The text is in sentence case and is split into three lines. It has a central, unjustified alignment. The "No. 17" part of the text is in the bottom left corner of the postcard.

Just below the photograph, about 1mm into the white rectangle that supports the caption, a black line about a half point in thickness runs from one edge of the postcard to the other.



Bologna, autumn 1940

Dear Franco,

For the millionth time I ask someone to forgive me for having put off writing to him. You know my habit, but perhaps your parents will be surprised at my laziness—give them warm greetings and also many thanks. I'm not very good at receiving gifts. Partly it makes me nervous, waiting to see what object I'll have to accept into my life, feeling like I'm being spoken for.

If the person knows me well though, and is considerate, the gift is really a gift. There is a generous attention needed when giving or making a thing, especially if you don't know who it's for—like cooking a meal for unknown guests. I can only approach this with a kind of charitable beauty and some common pivots. I want to offer apples, potatoes, and clear soups—hoping they'll be welcome, if passing.

Casarsa, 26 January 1944

Dear Luciano,

Today is Sunday and I have just got up, all warm with sleep; who would have thought that I have caressed your image with such friendship? After so long, so many months, so many Sundays. Naturally there is no excuse that will hold up because I could always find the time to write you a couple of lines.

What gestures do you make when I am walking in the fields or stand near the stove or go to Lynn Valley or laugh among faces you do not know? Fawns, vespers, evenings, noons, my gestures here, your gestures there, allowed to show themselves uselessly day after day in the vale of the light or the silence of the night.

Vancouver, 24 October 2012

Dear Franco,

As is my usual terrible habit, I have waited perhaps a little too long before writing to you. In this period nothing particularly interesting has happened in what goes on in my head—that is to say, nothing definitive and therefore nothing one can put on paper. The usual problems, the usual enthusiasms, the usual sudden setbacks. Only my ability to speak is more fluent than usual and I find it a great relief to be able to speak about it with my friends here. I feel that I have come—at least for the moment—to the end of poems that are *about*, and want to do poems that just are. It suddenly seems very strange to write about things, I mean, to describe them. Now that is a strange thing to feel. But I do. So I want something else.

p.s. Is it possible I could ask you to attempt the chore of constructing a short, coherent sentence out of my most basic feeling about LZ?

22 March 1911

Dear Mr. Norris,

With what joy I saw your handwriting again! You are really someone back from the dead. And for other reasons as well I thank Flora for having been the Christ who revived my sleeping Lazarus. You lucky person, to have so many things to tell me—I have nothing that is of interest to either of us. I have my life that goes on according to its patterns; it is becoming more and more interior and clear, more and more necessary. But these are things that interest others only if expressed, certainly not if enumerated as I might do with you in a letter.

The view of the country standing on top of the zig—that is another illness to which your presence, even if it's a dim fragrance of stale paper, gives the kind of happiness which these places now appear to me in dreams—in this neutral place that belongs to all and to none, where people pass by almost without seeing each other, where the life of the building regularly and distantly resounds.

Casarsa, 16 October 1946

Distinguished Sig. Contini,

I am replying to you after an enormous delay only because I feared this answer; your last letter in fact awoke in me two feelings which give a discourteous picture of me. 1) I have presented too strong an image. It's unwieldy and dominant—an image that has far too much to do with itself. It talks over everyone's conversations. Weaker images willingly accept the force of reading; they allow reading to wedge itself between the image and its subject. A weak image bears a rich materiality, but it forges its imposition as an offering. 2) I also suggested that a city was stable. I'm not sure how I came to that position, how I could think a city was anything but a shifting, composite thing.

Vancouver, 31 October 2012

Dear Shane,

Again I slept in. When I woke up at a respected hour I lured myself to sleep with the tedium of thoughts that presented themselves as a list of duties. The better excuse was to nurse my sore throat. That's the excuse for the moment. Last night I left the apartment to go to a birthday party. I left the building with my throat exposed. It is damp and rainy and spores from fungi and moss and lichen float around. The city viewed from this lens would give the gift of the recto sublime. And developers continue to laminate the city.

Through the north facing window, the Burrard Inlet is visible as a dirty silver rectangle beyond concrete and class, I mean glass. And now I do not hesitate to quote dear LR who says: And in these rough and farcical mirrors, the struggle to recognize a city. By a habitual process of transubstantiation, some of this struggle was named "the heart." But we wanted the heart to mean something other than this interminable roman metronome of failed eros and placation, something more like the surging modifications of the inventive sky.

Casarsa, 16 October 1946

Dear Argante,

Once again I have fallen short of my duty as a civilized person: will you forgive me? When I return to Alberta, I immediately notice the character of the skies, their difference. Even while changing every five minutes, they seem to outlast all other parts of the landscape. This is their form: a restless, porous physicality, as much a medium as a thing. The sky is somehow direct and immediate for everyone. I habitually ventured out in early afternoon, in the full economy of day, so I would never hear a clarity; the sound would not become an image. No figure would emerge. The city became rather soundfield, and I was not a figure either, not separate from field.

Paterson, 1946

Dear Shane,

Under my impenetrable silence I am writing to you in great haste. Overwhelmed by deadlines and looking for work—I received the update about the booklet and I adore the cerulean pages that support the letters. You should know that I have been talking to WCW and I feel reawakened. He is a base creature of the weather, like myself. I know clean air now, and my hangdog expression disappears, the only wisps left are those that mark time. I had to print it. Probably a giant view in whose apertures we cohabit, unaware of what air supports us.





THIS SPACE MAY BE USED FOR  
CORRESPONDENCE.

We climbed up  
to the top of this  
observatory from  
the top you can  
see all around  
the country & islands.

POST CARD.

1072

THIS SPACE FOR ADDRESS ONLY.



Miss Mary R. Russell  
N. Y. State Hospital,  
Schenectady,  
N. Y.



At the top of the back of the postcard, now horizontal in orientation, the words “POST” and “CARD,” separated by a space, are printed in large, serif, uppercase letters. These two words are off centre, to the left. Below the “T” in “POST” are two thin, parallel black lines equally inset from the base of the “T” and the far edge of the postcard. The parallel black lines divide the back of the postcard into two unequal halves.

At the top of the right side—the larger side—the phrase “THIS SPACE FOR ADDRESS ONLY” is printed in small, sans-serif, uppercase letters. Below this phrase, in casual but neat cursive, the recipient’s address is written: “Miss Mary N. Purcell, N.J. State Hospital, Trenton, N.J.”

The left side’s directive reads: “THIS SPACE MAY BE USED FOR CORRESPONDENCE.” Below it is written, in the same cursive: “We climbed up to the top of this observatory. From the top you can see all around the country. J. Norris.”

