

1-14-48

CB

JHB

✓
✓408 William Street
Key West, Florida

January 19, 1947

Dear Fred,

I owe you an account of my meeting with the Troys. The important fact, I suppose, is that Bill would consider a stint at Bennington at this time and might be glad to stay on. It seems also to be a fact that Bill has been teaching successfully and faithfully at the Y and the New School, though the only confirmation of that I have is oblique: the further fact that Bill has been asked to give three courses, instead of one, during the present year. I of course did not pry into the details of his personal life, but Bill and Leonie both spoke freely of their housing difficulties, the strain of their present commitments — between them they are teaching at four different institutions — of their wish for a more stabilized routine that would allow them to live with more satisfaction and less exhaustion. We talked at great length about Bennington, and I think that Bill would be willing to teach an advanced basic course along the lines he had originally laid out, and which I have been hopefully pursuing this year. He would also be ready to teach a course in Shakespeare, which he is scheduled to do in place of Auden at the New School; and his course in Proust, Marm, James, Kafka, and Joyce — among others — which he is currently giving at the Y. He could, if he wished, as in the past, teach a course in Literary Criticism and Aesthetics — and a half dozen other possibilities that would be highly desirable. And Leonie would, of course, also be on hand, though I did not sound the possibility of her availability. It occurs to me that even if she did not teach, she might be persuaded to take on special tutees or advisees, if the need arose.

I could not and did not mention Bill's drinking. The fact that Bill and Leonie are living together again, however, is distinctly encouraging; the fact that he is teaching regularly, with only occasional lapses, is also hopeful; and it appears that he has made a real attempt to resume writing, since he spoke of several reviews he had written or was in the process of writing. He was utterly lucid, eloquent, objective — and sober — when I saw him. I might point out here that they are living under highly unsympathetic conditions — in a cold-water tenement on the 5th floor of an old fire-trap (we spent some time discussing emergency exits), in three boxlike rooms for which they are having to pay \$100.00 monthly.

Frankly, I wish to see only what is hopeful in the situation; and I know that "cures" in such cases are few and tentative. My feeling, however, is that, all things considered, Bill is a real possibility and should be interviewed by you personally, if you or he can manage a meeting in New York

or Bennington. Ideally, he has all that we need and look for, plus, of course, years of experience with the circumstantial realities of the past. I am sure he would involve himself as deeply in college interests as ever — which is certainly deeper than I can ever claim to have penetrated. I think that the story of Bill's drinking, for all its hard truths, has been aggrandized into a legend and that we have all been guilty of trading in on its sensational aspects, if they have indeed been so. That fact that he has survived as a teacher in New York throughout these years should certainly mean something. Whether it means that he can survive as well, or better, at Bennington, with the objective dignities of a private family life around him, I have no real way of knowing. The choice would have to be a risky one, on the basis of the evidence of recent years: but I do not see that Bill is entirely beyond consideration at this time, or that all the possibilities, the good with the bad, should not be very carefully — and very promptly — weighed in the balance. Of course, I am very fond of Bill and my admiration for his mind and sensibility has never diminished, since none of Bill's excesses can diminish him for me. And you are yourself already well aware that others of us at B are risks, problems, screwballs, question marks, gambles, in other ways. It doesn't seem to me that Bill is notably moreso.

It's hard to say more, since I smart a little as I write under the belief that what I say here in Bill's — and Bennington's — service — may sound more like a disservice. I do wish you could see him, however; and doubtless you will find your own way of putting the most pressing questions to him directly — as I could not — and judging the chances.

I hope Maggie and you are enjoying some real leisure. Key West is utterly fulfilling and as I had remembered. My best to Charlotte and Jo when you see them.

Sincerely,

Ben

Bill's address: 307 West 69th Street, Apt. 15
Phone: TR 3-1725

Office of the President

BENNINGTON COLLEGE
BENNINGTON, VERMONT

January 29, 1948

f. fergusson

Mr. Ben Belitt
408 William Street
Key West, Florida

Dear Ben,

Thanks for your long and good letter on Bill Troy. I wasn't able to see him in New York because I had to come back here sooner than I had planned. Since my return, however, I have heard very definite news that Bill is by no means rehabilitated and that he has very definite lapses. One of these took place only a few days after you saw him. What I heard came from people who admire and love him, so I don't think it is in the nature of cheap gossip. It doesn't look very good and I am really very sorry indeed. I'll tell you more about this when I see you, but I think that the only sensible thing to do is to give up any thought of having him back.

We are in the midst of correspondence with a fellow named Hans Rothe who looks like a very hot candidate for the drama job. He is at Chapel Hill and it may be that we will have to arrange an interview with him before this semester begins. I had tried to stall this off until you could get back as I wanted very much to have you in on it. Our present plan is for me, Fergusson, Hill, and Shelly to see him and if he looks good we'll try to postpone a decision until you have had an opportunity to form a judgment. I am enclosing some of his correspondence. Francis Fergusson has seen it and thinks we should pursue it with might and main. Will you please return the material when you are through with it?

When do you plan to return?

Yours,

Fred

Frederick Burkhardt
President