

32 St. Marks Place

November 29, 1949

11:00 P.M.

Dear John,

This will be only the beginning of a letter to be finished when I have more time and strength. I must begin to write before some of the moods and thoughts are overlaid by the daily emergencies. Sometimes the problem of planning for my three or more classes a day seems like that of preparing for so many examinations.

I have felt so many things since I left your side Sunday night to assume again some kind of separate individuality — no longer determined by your every word and look. I can almost feel your disapproval as you think of me as you imagine me without your influence — a savage, God-forsaken tribe of emotions. No, but to be serious: For the most part, I have felt more serene and happy than I have this year (academic year). My classes have gone a little better. My Modern History class seemed quite interested in my fairly clear version of your lecture on Romanticism.

A few incidents of successful teaching like those of the past few days make me wonder what it is ~~in~~ that I prize in the success. Often I have feared that it was only my own skill as it was reflected in the comprehension of these minds. But recently I have felt it was something different — the delight in the response of an intelligent mind which loves and creates something new from the new idea. I have shown them ideas and facts as one shows a beautiful view to someone; it was not mine, nor was I particularly clever in discovering

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it. In the beginning, teaching meant for me a further release from the unhappy self-consciousness of my childhood. ~~However,~~ the release was only a new kind of self-conscious, happy and exciting, the performance of an actress, but still I was not free. Now I seem to have gone a little further. I am rarely conscious of the impression which I am making. Rather I worry (if I worry at all) over whether the facts are making the proper impression. I wish I could say this more clearly; it is still too new and imperfect.

Today when I left school I felt dizzy and quite strange from two days of very concentrated work and very little sleep. My trip home on the elevated was beguiled by picking out some passages on philosophy of history from an anthology called "The Practical Cogitator." There is one by Lord Acton, stern and anti-relativist, which I like like and suspect you would like. These I will have mimeographed for my class and see what they will say. Sometimes they make me feel as static as you said Judy made you feel.

This evening I have been reading "La Porte Étroite" and feeling more than a little upset by it. Perhaps I read too much into it and your recommendation. But why did you mark that passage? Perhaps you have forgotten. I hope it was something as transient as that. Yet I fear the reverse. I have not finished the book; perhaps I will ~~feel~~ feel differently when I have, but now I am frightened and anxious.

November 30

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10:30 P.M.

Dear John, In a few minutes Joy will be home and I will not be so peacefully alone as I am now. I have put away Gide for the moment and have been reading a little of Donne and some of "Purity of Heart." I read ~~so much~~ the Kierkegaard so often last year. I can remember the intensity of the feeling; I tried to use it as an amulet. I have been listening too to the chorale from the St. John Passion, "Ruht wohl." If only I could sit here quietly for an hour. But there is a test to be written and this letter to you. Not that the latter can be compared to any other requirement. But sometimes I feel that you feel that I cannot be right now or ever, so I am lame and stumbling in my words and thoughts as if you were Mr. Breining. Of course, there is a difference, but even the difference can be reason for doubt and fear. If I am so completely wrong then your attachment to me can only hurt you.

On the other hand, I can never wholly accept your judgment of me. It is not your sternness that I think wrong, but that your sternness is directed at trifles and details into which you read sins that do not exist for me. If only you could know how much of my sin, how many weaknesses, have been conceived and nourished in melancholy and despair. When I hope to be happy and serene I am not simply longing to be free of burden. Rather I resist the morbid desire to pile burden on burden. Remember that I said I feared what I knew to be the fact of my attraction to you - that it was based as much on your tendency to melancholy and ~~anxiety~~ unhappiness as on any other quality. Remember that I was first drawn to Leo because of his unhappiness.

There has been too much crisis and soul-searching in the times we have spent together, and in our letters, this letter too. I wish we ^{could} stop for a while. At least, let us not discuss it; try to accept and understand what I say here. I do not want an answer. If you feel there is something which you must say about it, say it, but do not look for ~~many~~ replies. If only, next time we are together, we could peacefully read something; or that I could tell you what I have taught or ask you what to teach next (then, perhaps you can tell me French thought 1848 →). Please, I do not want to skip ahead and read the endings. The habit was born in anxiety and impatience; a lonely child read each book knowing that at the end of each she would be alone again; a new one would have to be found if life was to continue.

Now it is after twelve. I must try to sleep.

December 1

I have been reading "Purity of Heart" again, this time, quite quietly and without desperation. Do you remember what he says about the need to be an individual, not to merge in the crowd nor to discuss oneself with a friend, the "third person" in the intimate relationship of an individual with God. You remember that I half-jokingly said that I must not follow my ^{without a thought} submissive tendency, the tendency to accept your corrections even when you incorrectly correct my grammar. I have never really been an individual — either because of fear of being alone and unable to be happy alone, or from an almost blind desire to submit and to be merged in something stronger, whether good or not. I wish to be the sort of individual of which Kierkegaard speaks.

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Reread the book and try to understand my yearning. I think it is the same as your yearning to be alone. You must not ask me to give up parts of my personality in order to belong to your "world". Whatever I give up must be given for a different purpose in a different way. Then if I were made free in this way (and I know it is not freedom ~~from~~ ~~from~~ from control, but rather the freedom of accepted obedience) perhaps I could give to you, or to someone else, whatever of the spirit it is allowed to give.

Yet I need you so very much. To talk to you of things I see dimly is to bring them to a light, and so to see them and love them better. I do not think I ever really understood "The Journey of the Magi" until I tried to explain to you the strange mystery and enchantment it had for me. Force me to explain and clarify; I need to be confirmed in what I know but hesitate to do or say.

Today has been difficult but good. Finally I have stirred my American History class to talk and to think. For two days we have been talking about the poetry and drama of the Civil War and Lincoln and, even further removed from fact, philosophy of history. Now they do not sit there in collective (but polite) hostility refusing to like American History. They are thinking and changing, and, as I see this happen, I can understand and love them as individuals - instead of fearing them as "my failure". However, I do not love them because they are "my success" either. That is very good.

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I wish this letter were clearer. I am very tired and there is work to be done this evening. Now I must help Joy to make supper. Please forgive the fact that this letter is so fragmentary and written in such small snatches. I will try to do better next time, but I thought it better to write now and to write badly than not to write at all.

I wonder what you will think of all this. Is it
it still another

Margaret?