

January 6, 1950

Dear John, All afternoon I have been in the library at school reading about medieval art and architecture - especially stained-glass windows - and thinking about you. I must begin my letter now before the warmth and happiness of your visit is overlaid by all the necessary details of my work; I have so many different kinds of work to do this weekend and so little desire to do them.

So little was said, but the very fact of your being here was so important. All the other times that I have seen you I have come to you, escaping, from something that was too much, either my work or something else. But your coming to me in the midst of my work when it was going well meant that I was quite free of any shadow of desperation. And it seemed also to make my life here something that was included in my friendship with you.

I am glad that Plato ~~said~~ ^{stated} clearly to you the dangers of ^{the} intoxication of melancholy - which I have struggled vainly to express more than once.

(2)

Perhaps I have not made as much of an effort to say this as I could have. There are several reasons, of which the most important is that I recognise the validity of that understanding of suffering which is so ~~is~~ linked with its perversion - melancholy. I have been afraid that in trying to explain how wrong melancholy is that you would misunderstand me and suppose me to be preaching a philosophy of insensitive optimism. Also melancholy is sometimes just the exhaustion resulting from the struggles of growing up. I could not reject or criticize that, though I remember how young you are only rarely and with a shock of surprise. Perhaps because I haven't grown up.

I am always disturbed when you mention some of your spiritual and emotional struggles as things that you do not think I want to hear about. It is linked in my mind with the fear and uncertainty which you betray when you say that you do not know whether I understand, or want to understand you, or when you say that you are afraid I am deceiving you. I do not think these are the words you used but ~~these~~

this is the way I have understood them. I am not uninterested in anything that concerns you deeply and intensely. I have, as a matter of fact, noticed a certain reluctance in myself when you have ~~talked~~ mentioned these things. I think I know ^{now} why it exists and what it means. One reason that I have not urged you to talk about these matters is that I am not sure ~~that~~ that I could understand them no matter how vividly you related them and how ~~big~~ great was my sympathy. Perhaps, I could only say "I am a woman, and these struggles are more subtly veiled and not so intense". I could tell you about things that frighten and horrify me, but I do not think you would understand either; in some places your ~~im~~ imagination would exaggerate and in others it would fall short.

Furthermore, I am afraid that having told me you would want some kind of judgment. If I should only look calmly at you and accept all that you said you might feel me to be deficient in distinguishing between good and evil. But there are so

many reasons why I cannot judge you.

But perhaps you only want to talk about them for confessional purposes. It would probably be better to tell me than to write a book, a Joycean book. In that case I could listen to you without fear. You must decide, and I am sure that these decisions are good for your character. I hope all this does not disturb you now when you should be studying for your examinations. Well, at any rate, it will probably do less harm than if I came to see you. You cannot expect me to be completely self-restrained and say ~~that~~ and do nothing disturbing until the crisis is over. So just remember that I will listen to everything but that I am incapable of being as severe to you as you are to yourself. I am a separate individuality and cling to the peculiarities of my conscience. [I wonder if you can tell in reading my letters which ~~lets~~ sentences have been written with a naughty smile.]

Sunday
10 PM

6

I have spent the better part of the weekend alone and it really has been the better part. Jay is not back yet. I hope she will not come for about two hours. Then I could finish my letter to you, look over the examination I have been working on, and be in bed, incommunicado. Yesterday was full of strange contrasts. I slept badly the night before and at 7:30 the lady who lives downstairs was hammering on the door to scold me for letting the ice box pan overflow to leak through onto her possessions. Actually, it was not an ice-box pan at all, but a pipe that had broken. It took a long time to straighten it out; I hate these unpleasantnesses out of all proportion to their gravity. I spent the rest of the morning in the Test Laboratory of Teacher's College trying to find a standardized test for at least one of my courses - a stupid and fruitless task. I had lunch with the boy who did a paper on Missouri Negro cases - like mine on Kentucky. His mother has died recently, and he is exhausted by the strain of that and all that led up to it.

I wanted be kind, or sympathetic, or something useful, but it seemed necessary only to listen as he rattled on about the variety of things that always occupy his excitable and unbalanced temperament. Fortunately we had lunch in the calmness of the Theological Seminary. Otherwise I don't think I could have coped with the strangeness of the meeting.

I spent most of the afternoon in the Cloisters going carefully through the parts through which I will take my class. I really understood for the first time the beauty of the things there. I hope I will be able to describe it to them. This is a place I would like to go sometime with you.

I had to leave before I wanted to, in order to go to Bobbie Brigham's to meet his mother. There were other people too - and drinks. Janet was very nice in the few minutes that I talked to her quite alone. I managed to thank her for her efforts ~~at~~ at Christmas.

When I finally got away I was quite

dizzy. Alcohol never intoxicates me to the extent of garrity; it just makes things more difficult. I felt cross because of having been politely coerced into drinking too much and went to sleep. You know, the control and wariness that makes it impossible for me to be cheered by liquor is the same thing that prevents me from giving way to the extremes of melancholy. There is always the cautious observer, the calculating adviser, that tells me to stop and not to feel or express more.

I have worked here all day though I intended to go to church tonight. But it was terribly cold outdoors, and I was in the midst of the Modern History Exam. So I rationalized and explained to myself why I could remain here and read the Bible - and write to you, a less worthy alternative.

So much of the work I meant to do still remains. But I feel beautifully calm and tranquil - as if I were still in the Romanesque cloister with its beautiful capitals and flowers among the

mass, and a fountain.

There is a quotation from Bacon which I read Friday that keeps haunting me - as much I think for the language and balance as for the thought: "There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion". I am haunted too by a Pieta, the body of the Christ, stiff, awkward, and only about half the size of the Mary. I had not realized before why the Christ was so small - that she was remembering holding him as a child. The statue was not beautiful, but the idea is.

Goodnight,

Margaret