

Cambridge, February 17, 1950

Dear Margaret,

This letter shall be the end of a long day through which the memory of you shone like a golden thread in a piece of sackcloth. Writing you tonight is like playing a melody that has been on my mind all day long, by no means a perfect melody and recollected hazily and with occasional mistakes, but the restatement of it gives the past an aura of completeness and intelligibility.

What shall I write you about the memory? Will it hurt you if I told you that it had much less to do with you than with me, and that the sense of solitude which I love so well still protects me? Sometime we shall have to talk about aestheticism; perhaps I am too much of an aesthete, but the memory of your visit is like the memory of a landscape or of a mountain and at the same time like the memory of a work of art.

This evening I tried to find the picture of Lucretia, but could not. Will you tell her good-bye for me? I came instead upon some pictures of Hendrikje of which I have always been fond, but they mean much more to me now. Also this evening Alex and I went to hear Mozart's C minor Mass together with a friend of ours. I heard the Mass last year in March, when I was in the midst of my travail, and its harmonies are laden with memories ~~for me~~. Particularly I liked the Agnus Dei, which I used to play myself, as best I could; when I heard it today, I knew that some parts of me had changed a great deal since last year, and some parts had remained unchanged, and I dared to hope that the worse parts had changed, and the better parts had remained.

In retrospect, your visit of last week seems to have been a climax of some sort. What is to come? For my part, I am alarmed by the extremes between which I am torn, most conspicuous of which are the desire to be alone and the necessity for companionship, a propensity for the sensual and a revulsion against all sensuality, a state of emotional exhaustion which shrinks from every exertion, and the passion for activity and accomplishment, growth and development which leaves me no rest. And you, as long as you are with me, are caught in these contradictions. Please do not let them hurt you.

It is late; I must go to bed. Your relatives are going to New Hampshire this week, and beginning tomorrow I shall be undisturbed, so that I hope to get much work done. Whenever you come, I will have time for you, although it will doubtlessly be better if you can postpone your coming for one or even two weeks.

Good night.

John