

Germantown  
July 12, 1950

Dear Jochen,

This has been a hard day. This morning I tried very hard to concentrate as I sat reading your difficult language. But my eyes or my mind wandered from the page so many times that I finally had to give up. I have wasted so much time this summer looking out of the window at nothing. I think that I have lived again through all the unpleasant moments of my life, and I have the taste of bitter regret almost continually in my mouth. No wonder so many of the things that I say to my family have an ungracious flavor. I hoped that your letter, when it came, would make me feel better, but it only made things harder. It seemed cold and angry at something that I could not find. I turned over all the words and held them up to the light looking for the affection and consolation that I wanted; but there was nothing but a kind of cold duty. Did you mean to write such a painful letter? I have reminded myself of what you have told me before—that your letters are not premeditated and that they are written in a mood. And sometimes funny typing errors tell me that it was so quickly done that you did not even proof-read it. It is hard to live on such a letter for two days. Sometimes I think that your mind is so fixed on your own injuries and difficulties that you give little thought to the effect your words will have; and I suppose that I am guilty of the same thing. Perhaps my recent letters were even worse than I knew them to be. And yet I never write, and almost never speak, without a fear, that often chokes me, of saying something that will hurt you. It is very fortunate for me that sometimes I can submerge my consciousness in the physical duties I must perform. Unlike you at your painting, I can sometimes think of nothing as I slice onions, or stir soup, or set the table. And today I have made each small act last as long as possible, in order to postpone the moment when I sit down with a book and begin to think again.

I feel as if I had made almost no progress at all with my German-reading, and yet sometimes a passage on a page reads so easily that I am hardly conscious of translating. I took a few notes for my Medieval history course this afternoon, and that small achievement gave me more pleasure than almost anything that I have done this week.

Mother, whose memory is very short sometimes, imagines that I was never so silent and gloomy as I have been this summer. I think that she is wrong but I cannot become gay in order to banish the specters that trouble her. Unfortunately, she imagines that the housework that I do for her is partly to blame, and she is always urging me to go on a trip with Alex somewhere, especially to visit our Canadian relatives, but so far Alex has also resisted.

Do you know cantata 158 (Der Friede sei mit Dir)? I have played it several times in the last few days, and it makes me very peaceful for the few minutes that it lasts. I have also found some photographs of the sculpture of Chartres which I long to look at with you—especially an apocalyptic Christ. He makes me feel very confused and unprepared. I think often of the medieval "folk" who "longed to go on pilgrimages to ferne holwes couth in sondry landes". They knew how hard it was to be good at home. If only I could make the far journeys of the spirit while my body stayed here. But I am failing again this summer as I have done so many times before. And yet I believe that if you were here, things would be different. I guess I will always be pagan and never Christian. Good night. Deine Margarete