

Telephone number: 362-3678

3601 49th Street, N W Washington D C 20016 18 November 1965

My dear Red: Oh, nobody knows better than I all the reasons that keep writers from writing letters... I have begun to hesitate to write to my friends whose lives and energy I value and do not want to misuse, just because they instantly get the idea that they must write to me in turn. Don't mistake this for generosity-- its just a level look at one of the facts of life: and I love to write letters, and love to get them from my friends, but for a good while now- too long- I have been living in a snake pit between Hell and High Water, and that is not a restful place to get bogged down in...

Two hours ago I had in my hand the big envelope containing your poem: I mean to point you out some lines that I loved at first sight, and then second, but I cannot remember lines as I once did: (once I knew all of Shakespeare's Sonnets by heart and in their right order- or what was then taken for their right order. I was reading the other day some critic who set out to prove that Shakespeare wrote all those sonnets to HIMSELF, and that if you jostle the sonnets around in a certain order, it can be proved... I think that is what ~~he~~ he said. It was late at night and I was sleepy: and I long ago decided for myself that I for one didn't care who Shakespeare wrote those sonnets to, I was just glad he wrote them: and much as I love John Crowe's ^{Ransom's} poetry, and have and will, I never paid any more attention to his criticism after I read his blast against Shakespeare's Sonnets..) Well, that poem has vanished out of this little office, I have retraced my steps all over the house and I cannot find it. But it is not lost. I bet, I hope, I must believe that My beautiful and long-suffering Miss Miller has toted it down stairs and filed it away. When you all get well and come to see me, you will be astonished at the operation we are carrying on ~~now~~ in that basement.

You remember? I had two nearly fatal rounds of pneumonia in ten months last year, and here, just a year later, I am not well, and I take care of myself, and follow docto-'s orders, and have refused about thirty speaking engagements- except one at the Library of Congress-- (stet!)

and spend twelve or fourteen hours a day in bed, and try to eat properly, and as a result I am apparently withering away. So you are now called upon to rise up and assert your authority as sole head of the house under God, and restrain Eleanor for her good and everybody else's, if this last crowd matters. Because you can get well from one case of pneumonia in about a year, but not two... In answer to your timely question ~~as~~ whether I have learned any sense, the reply could nearly be yes, but I think a little too late. So please remind Eleanor not to waste herself because you can't afford it. Nor can we, the Others.

Next day. I don't remember what interrupted me yesterday, and can't foresee what will stop me this ~~even~~ time, but anyway, I haven't the poem, my Rosa has been in here again tidying up, but I love your poetry, I have every one you ever published, you have always been to me first of all a poet, best of all your work, I am happy you are in the vein again, if you were ever out of it. But I will read eagerly anything you write.

Did you happen to notice that a reviewer on Time called me "the grimmest misanthrope in the history of American literature" or something like that, and an Irishman on the New York Review tried to bulldoze me off the literary landscape altogether. The last phase in life has set in. But they can't hurt me-- I have had and have just the friends I would have chosen, and now come the right enemies. Life is

good, in a little uncertain just now. Love again Ruth