

Louis Simpson, representing Berkeley, demurred. He explained that I suffered from a very pronounced speech defect, and that it would be a kindness not to expose me to public terror and humiliation that a poetry reading by me would certainly entail. Since Simpson was the only one of the group who could claim to know me personally, his word on the subject was final. Henri explained that when I answered his phone call, he was astonished and pleased to find I could talk without difficulty. [. . .]

I've written a short (700 words max) essay on Tennyson's song, "Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white," trying to explain the pronoun "she" in the sixth line in reference to the peacock, which is male. I've sent a copy to Christopher Ricks, and will let you know what he says. I've spoken with him on the phone about it, and he acknowledges it is a puzzle he never gave attention to before. [. . .]

All the best to Evelina and to you.

Tony

December 29, 2000 Washington DC

[To Brad Leithauser and Mary Jo Salter]

Dear Brad and Mary Jo,

This comes with warm and grateful thanks for your generous gifts. The crimson heart was right out of [Richard] Crashaw, and now adorns our tree, but the CD is another matter altogether. Those Schumann trios are quite wonderful, and were unknown to me. The liner notes urge one to find affinities to Mendelssohn, who was admittedly greatly admired by Schumann. Nevertheless, I found myself feeling the rich effects of Brahms, who was another Schumann hero. I only recently finished reading a fine Brahms biography by Jan Swafford, which I can strongly recommend. Schumann, and, of course, Clara, both play major roles in the story, Schumann's particularly pathetic and moving. Lots of supporting characters, chiefly Wagner, Liszt, Chopin, but plenty of conductors and critics as well. Schumann's special brand of madness, which was suicidal, is beautifully described, and made altogether sympathetic; and this is the more striking in that one of the other presents I received this season (from Helen) was the unabridged journals of Sylvia Plath, a book that is nearly repellent in its narcissistic self-absorption, and has a number of quite mean things to say about me, some of them very peculiar indeed, such as the claim that I have my hair "professionally curled." She was really stark raving bonkers. She also claimed that I squirreled away my Hudson Review Fellowship, wishing to hoard it at a time when both Sylvia and Ted were envious, and wished they could have a