

Mid November

Hello folks,

You have really been beavering away (the beaver in Canada gnaws down trees with its mighty front teeth and we think of it as a very hard working animal) as I was saying, you have been beavering away and I have a sea of letter^s spread on my desk awaiting an answer, reaction or sometimes a side-step. No, as the task of answering is pleasant I really feel like doing it.

Do you know why I missed class on Tuesday? On Monday night my train from Canterbury to London was delayed for nearly an hour. This was due to lateness leaving Canterbury but also to the fact that three boys on that train mugged a girl (it was late in the evening) and ^{we} were stopped in a station for three quarters of an hour, as the engine driver called the police. I say "they mugged her". She accused them of mugging her. I did not see it happen as I was not in their part of the train. They ^{boys} came rushing up to my part of the train, the front part, and ^{amazingly} she came after them and spoke to them. She seemed a funny creature - why had she not pulled the communication cord when they went for her (to go for = to attack). The police questioned everybody when we got to the next station. They arrested one of the boys but the other two got clean away. I wonder what happened to him on Monday night in the police cells? The terrible thing in England is that the police are both brutal and corrupt but they have the reputation of being upright and decent. They will probably have beaten him up to get him to give them the names and addresses of the other ~~two~~ two. I feel very ambiguous about the whole strange incident. (Ambiguous means, in this case, two feelings)

At ~~██████████~~, in last week's letter you speak of a feeling of lethargy and lack ~~of~~ ^{lack} of spise and energy. The term is a long one and it good that you are going through this feeling well before the exam. Important, though, that you perk up over the next couple of weeks. You first letter about how Scots are warm people and about how people from some regions of a country have the reputation of being warm prompts me to ask K██████████ and the Japanese folk if this is true for their countries too. Do some parts of Thailand and Japan have the reputation of being friendlier than others? Yes, [↑] At ~~██████████~~ I would like to hear a lot more about the way your boarding school was run, as I too spent long years in a similar prison. My sentence was five years, while yours was just three. Has anybody else in our group been a boarder at school. (Maybe University is different, as you are older and better able to assert yourself.)

attacked
Kwv

Kaholi, thank you for last week's mouth-watering letter about the different types of okonomiyaki. What are the main differences between a normal potato and what you term 'mountain potato'? Not clear to me. Is the difference one of size, colour, texture, taste or ~~what~~? You write really professionally about cooking.

Kwis, yeah, I can see that Sam's return home must have made you feel a bit homesick. She'll have her problems though, as going home only looks like a bed of roses while you are abroad. Clearly she has 'father-management' problems. He was only going to be told of her return about one week before ~~before~~ it happened - the job of telling him fell to her mother! Dads are a difficult lot! Mine was! I wonder if I will ever know what I look/sound/feel like to my own kids. Please go on trying to find us some texts on Thailand- what we want is really good quality writing. Like Antonella, you seem to be in a bit of a trough. Given the speed at which you write and think, your letters to me could be several pages longer. Maybe I'm the wrong correspondent for you, *sometimes*.

Your letter from last week, Sachiko, is fascinating. Listen, I am very interested in your letters in two ways: (a) what you say (b) what you don't say. What a person does not say is very instructive if you 'read' it carefully. I am amazed that you started planning this trip to UK when you were still 16 and that you chose ~~the~~ Tokai rather than some other university because it ~~is~~ owns CAE. You sure did show determination and a grasp of the need to plan well into the future!! I hope your future husband is a man who knows his own mind- if not he will simply have to do everything ~~you say~~, *poor guy!*

It seems, Johanna, that you had a great time in London with your sister. What made you choose to take her to a Japanese restaurant on Saturday night? Do you often go to Japanese restaurants in Vienna? The great classical cuisines of world stature seem to be those of China and France but maybe Japan and Italy can compete on almost equal terms. What do other people think? Maybe what I have said is foolish- ~~the~~ China is a continent and it has umpteen different cuisines. Think of the ~~really~~ hot, spicy dishes from Szechuan which ^{are} quite unlike what they eat in Beijing.

Sachiko, is the Atsuko you mention in your second letter the same Atsuko who Sue tells me will be joining this group next week? I assume so. Yes I think I do understand your feeling, though it is dangerous to think you know what another thinks/feels. I can never be you.

Come on, Fede, your last letter is ^{too} guilt-ridden. Who hasn't had the experience of getting blind-drunk a few times in his life? I have seen my 23 year old son paralytic with drink a couple of times, and he's an extraordinarily mature bloke for his years. No, I don't think you were childish- I feel you did something looney but totally normal. No harm done. This does not mean that I don't hear what you are writing about and the bad feeling- I just want to put it in a broader context. Thank you for the pen-picture you paint of the host family granny. It is very fluent and full- you are back in the mood when you write English well. I understand such linguistic moodiness. ^{I'm} Looking forward to your thoughts on Cavafy. It's great fun to share ^{enthusiasms} about books.

Your Tuesday letter indeed speaks of Cavafy and his writing about 'windows'. I found this letter a little hard to follow. It was as if you were writing in a code, and I did not have the key. Can you swoop down from the sky and talk to this earth-^{worm} in terms he can follow, please?

Sachiko writes that the ^sproject of being in an all Japanese group while studying in an international school ~~is like~~ is like being a caged bird. A powerful and accurate image. You are right to complain that Tokai did not tell you what would happen during your year in UK. You should have asked, but then you have been trained to obey rather than to ask and demand. I certainly don't regard you as a grumbler (you are really starting to use full English words and come out of "Japlish.") How dare you write: " My sentences are not interesting for you." You can't know that. What interests me is regulated by my brain! Ah, now I understand, Monday's Atsuko is your sister. Is she your kid sister? No, I haven't talked to her yet. Can you please introduce me to her? I'd like her to join the group at 11.00 on Friday. It would be very bad if she missed the week-end homework!

Kwis, why is it good to bring sand into the temple during the water festival in April? What is the symbolic meaning of doing this? You can't end your letter with Dear Kwis! I can say this to you but you can't say it to yourself. OK endings between us would be yours/ bye for now/ see you tomorrow/ take care etc...

Your letter, Miho, about visiting a church last Sunday is both lyrical and very grammatically correct. Technically this bit of writing would pass FCE. Phrases like " I felt as though my heart were being washed clean " shows me you ^{are} gaining a new grasp on the language. Something really OK is happening, linguistically. The more you write to me about things that are real to you, probably the better the language will be.

Utter rubbish, Vincent, you ^r homework does not provoke mirth- some of it is a really good read. You are a looney ^{to} talk even jokingly about ^{our} ' Barbarian English '. Clearly what you need, Vincent, is a time-stretching machine so that you can cram all the things you want ^{to do} into the 24 hours each day brings. How long do you sleep? Mrs Thatcher gets by with 4-5 hours per night. I need around six hours. One day I'll beat her to it! I have read your letter about the flight simulators with interest. I am interested in the creation video-disc language courses which might well have a strong simulation element in them. The stuff in this area so far produced is unadulterated crap (pure shit). Could you copy the article you have recently found on women in Japan for the women-in-Japan-in-our-group? Could be of interest, though (tho) to everybody.

I cut out articles for all you people. Why don't you do the same for me? Bring me things you think I have missed and which would interest me. The task is not hard as I have an avid magpie mind.

Isabel, you say your landlord is self-employed while his wife goes out to work. Being self-employed allows him to stay at home and be the houseman. How would you feel about being an employee in the outside world while your husband was ~~self~~ self-employed at home? (notice the grammar of the last sentence).

Your image, Kanae, of the library as a kind of haven, a restful place where you are with others but at the same free within ^{yourself} is, for me, a powerful one. Libraries can have ^a very different symbolism. Can you imagine a library as being a dark, terrifying place, full of fear and doom? Ask Fede or Simona or Antonella about the Name of the Rose by Umberto Eco- Maybe you have seen the poor film they made of the novel. Sarah's letters is a very strong book. ^h The important thing, though, about Sarah is that though she went through a bad patch at school she came out at the end a very full and ⁿ enriched person. Great, Kanae, that you are cooking- I want another correspondent with ^{whom} I can talk about food. It's a secondary but still important thing in my life.

Simona, you ask about the book project that Peta, Nicky and Sheila and I am involved in. The title could be:

WHAT CAME THROUGH THE LETTER-BOX

There will be lots of real letters written by native speakers to one another for students to read and work from. There will be official letters, junk mail (advertising stuff), trivial personal letters deep and powerful personal letters, bills, postcards etc... We will not include petrol bombs or dog faeces in the book, though both of these get put through Pakistani letterboxes in East London by fascists.

Apart from the reading part of the book there will also be a writing section in which we offer lots of ways in which students can write letters to real and imaginary people. What was Gerry for you yesterday, a real person or an imaginary one? The core idea of the writing section is that you write text to some one who is alive and breathing and loving, not to that blank wall called a teacher with a red pencil.

You write that you feel there is a deep link between a people and their landscape and you quote the example of Southern Italy. What do other people feel? Do you agree with Simona? I know that Kanako uses the weather as a metaphor for her moods. Simona uses the landscape as a kind of metaphor for the people... or am I misrepresenting you Simona ?

Kanako, you ask me about the way your English is. Can I answer you by telling you a story. I once had a woman from Singapore in a learning group (they were teachers on a training course) and she wore her ^{hair} tightly bound into a bun on the top of her head. Each morning it was like this, until the Friday of the first week. That morning her incredible long black hair was cascading down over her slim shoulders like a waterfall. I know that you can take your English out of 'its bun' and let it flood down like a waterfall. This has happened recently in Sachiko's letters: a trickle of words has turned into a ^{river} ~~flood~~ and the flood is much better ^{and} more grammatically accurate English than the trickle was. This freeing, this loosening this relaxing into more English is what I hope to read you doing. It may well come suddenly, like dreaming in the language does.

Listen, everybody, I want to congratulate you as a group for your hard work and willingness to write a fair bit and read a lot. ~~These~~ These two ways are the royal road to success in the exam and to staying mentally alive in the misery of an exam class.

Good night,
a satisfied friend and teacher,