

Dearest D. Once again thank you very much for the two books you sent. I was a bit dissappointed with Atuk, the theme being so promising, but degenerated too much in a comedy 'sketch. Good satire, I feel, should have something much more down to earth and sincere and TRUE in it. As for Diana Athill (Her name is on ALL PAPERS, bless her, and one is very proud and rather happy to be her friend) Her story 'My daughter in law' did really impress me very much, and I'd like to discuss it, or rather talk to you about for a while. If you are going to go on writing in that way, you are going to be very famous; I mean as famous as Iris Murdoch and Doris Lessing and Mary McCarthy. In the last three stories I read, the daughter in law, the one about the boy and cricket, and the one I read in London about that woman meeting an old flame of hers and being at the end dissappointed because he didn't insist on going to bed with her (this was an excellent piece) you are a 'creator of 'atmosphere' '. They are planned stories, very well executed, with a point, in them. They are Contemp. most Sophisticate literature (New Yorker) and, I am sure, very difficult to think out and complete. Now they are the works of an excelling ARTISAN. This, perhaps, is the reason why I feel your stories have to be criticised and why I want you to change your ways in writing, (I'M just rattling away, darling, and I know very well my ideas of literature may be just a lot of bull) and not use your tools to carve perfect pieces, but to aim at something else. You are too EFFICIENT in your stories, you have a technical mastery, a technique which I am sure is a very difficult thing to acquire (I've tried at times, but have never managed it), but, Diana, a technique. It is very much in vogue at the moment, and few persons have mastered it, but a technique - all the same as opposed creating something. You are more yourself in your letters and I prefer the scene in your letter, where you are an artist, than when you are the artisan. Your letters are in parts very creative and better literature (in my silly opinion) than your publications, because then you are NOT Conscious of writing for a public or anything like that; and because then it is not a matter of setting your tools in order and beginning a piece of work. As you know, there IS a certain 'Gift' or 'talent' some possess for writing, and this gift, I don't think, can really be acquired. You have your 'gift' and that 'talent' but, I am afraid, if you are not careful, you are going to submerge them underneath your technique and cleverness. I tell you all this, because I liked this 'My daughter in law' story, and wanted to know what is going to happen next sort of thing and I wonder what will happen now, until, suddenly you ended your story, at the exact point where it is sophisticated to do so, (and where people liking your story will be very proud and say 'Ah, I, of course' appreciate literature, otherwise I would have been dissappointed with this story) and ended it as soon as you had rounded off the 'point' so to speak.

I wish you'd send me a nice sarcastic letter and tell me, "Do let me know more about writing, please".

I've received, just out of the blue, a letter from a French publisher saying he's heard a lot of Beer in The Sneaker club (How, from whom? it's all so very strange) and they want a copy. I've written to André about NOT giving him 20 s/o of my next books American rights (il a du culot, entre nous. Il me prend pour un imbecile, c'est certain) and I hope he'll answer very quickly and tell me he DOESN'T want foreign rights of BEER. I hope you don't mind, Diana. I know you want to be a good business woman and all that and if, for whatever reason, you want me to accept André's next offer, please tell me as soon as possible. Is it possible to send me a couple of of the proofs? Did Phillip write to Engle? I mean send him a copy?

Brenda, that girl who saved my life in Hamburg, has written to tell me that if I went to America I would hate every minute of it. She knew me here when I am hating Germany and she said if I went to the States I'd really go mad with hatred. Don't know what to do.

No-one, I realise now, knows exactly what we're doing in this office here. The German Section with Otto at its head is alright. But it is quite clear now, that our Limey section is most chaotic, and I mean that most literally. I have been doing very strange things indeed in the last two weeks and having shared my doubts with our nice major, has indeed made him look rather perplexed these last few days, so much so, that he has ceased walking amongst us, smoking his pipe, and singing in a very loud voice "Mums and Dads, mums and daddys, let's all play mums and dada (A catching song, I feel; strangely never heard of it before.)

Fact is as follows. I get, let us say 100 debit vouchers a day. I make a list of them, send each voucher to the different officers, and the list to the Quarter Master; having stamped each debit voucher with our stamp. (I've been told to do that) Now a week later, I receive, strangely, the same list from the Quarter master, and the same debit vouchers with HIS stamp. This you feel, is some sort of subtle system of accounts. Now I have to repeat the SAME list, send it BACK to the Quarter MASTER (Who knows it by heart now) and again, send the debit vouchers, the very same, to all the officers concerned. Now a few days later, the same vouchers return, having again been Stamped by the Quarter Master, with the list, a new one, but with the same information in it, attached. By this time, you realise I've stamped the same sheet three times, so has the Quarter Master, and I'm unable to read the names on it. The English chap, it seems, before me, L/Cpl Smith, went on doing this for the last three years, his brother in law, Woll Boyle, in the Quarter Master's office, being the one send him back to him with HIS stamp. To-day, of course, because of this business, has been a hilarious day. "What do you suggest, Mr. Ghali?"

"Sir, I suggest the Quarter Master, stamps the vouchers, makes the list, put the whole lot away for a day, take them out again, pretend they've come here and that I've sent them back".

"Aha"

"Repeating the performance as many times as he sees fit, sir."

He's singing Mums and Dads all over again as I'm writing this and everything's alright.

I've written two short short stories, Guardian length, which I shall type out and send on Monday.

Whatever happened to that woman who was supposed to look after Barbara's baby and who had one of her own? Remember?

Everyth ing alright now, I mean in life in general. Work, a bit of writing, reading (thanks again) sleep, beer and a bit of laughter at the office

Lots of love,

Waguih.