

Chu Lai
February 17

Dear Lou -

I was all set to write such an intelligent letter this evening when the power went off for the second day in a row - this time, completely. Just as I was hunting for some paper, the lights began to dim and our one (rather ragged) electric typewriter emitted a wail, ground its teeth, and died. Lighting a candle (regulations), we all arranged chairs & cushions as comfortably as possible & did our best to get some sleep. A few minutes ago, all the lights snapped right back on (a disconcerting experience). Anyway, here I am, peering like a mole in the "sunlight" (rich "colorful" phraseology, & ~~am~~ tired) and not feeling very intelligent at all.

So, instead, I hope you'll settle for snippets and pieces which I'll write down as I remember them. I've been reading something which might almost (but not quite) be called science-fiction, a novel called Queen Victoria's Bomb. It was written by an English journalist who had done a book on British nuclear research. The basis of the idea is that the theory necessary to the creation of an atomic bomb was available in the 1800s (stretching a point but why not?) and that an English scientist could actually have done so. The novel is in the form of said scientist's memoirs, and the author has done quite a loving job of going through the most obscure & frivolous of memoirs, etc., to provide realism for each of his scenes. The conclusion of the book is that, all in all, Victoria would have handled the whole thing much more discretely and much more sensibly than any 20th century statesman. It's rather delightful and filled with such things as quotations from Prince Albert's Golden Precepts.

Also found one of the Cecelia Holland historical novels in the special services library. This one is about the Emperor Frederick II. I just glanced at it so far - the page size & shape is rather unusual.

I've read my way through your first package of books - with the exception of Gogol and Rabelais. Gogol I started and, at the moment, I can't take. People who are neither fat nor thin, but not very bright at all, and towns that are neither rich nor poor, but generally rather dull are

so much like Chu Lai to bear-reading at the moment. Rabelais I am reading very slowly & enjoying - although this translation leaves a little to be desired. Cf. ~~from~~ a passage from the introduction, from this edit & from the one I read for a course:

a. " ... Respect the cheese-shaped brain that feeds you on such delicate puff-balls. "

b. " ... Respect the cheese-like brain that feeds you on such delicate maggots. "

The first (this edit) may be more correct literally (for all I know) but the second brings out the sentiments of the statement a little more clearly. [I checked. a puff-ball refers to the sort of fungus that bursts to spread its spores. But from the sound of it, it might very well be a new way of preparing potatoes - or a breakfast cereal.]

Even so, it's still Rabelais', and very enjoyable. It's also nice to be aware that I know what in most cases (or many cases) he's talking about - and sometimes know a little more, or better, than the footnotes (always cause to be smug). Anyway, I've been waiting impatiently for the next consignment you shipped.

I finally replied to a letter from Ticia, in which she, very flatteringly, asked for an opinion on some books which have some religious implications. I hope my reply didn't shock her - it's rather long, in very small handwriting, and extremely opinionated. In fact it may even be a bit crabby - I'm not sure. At any rate, it more or less scribbled itself, so I disclaim too much responsibility.

Write as much as you can.

Love,
Rob

(Dad's letter was sent yesterday morning, yours & Momma's this morning - what the Army will do with them I don't know; it might give you a way to gauge variables in mail delivery from here)