

(No.1: 28th July, 1963)

“Farlton,”

O’Connell Terrace,

Limerick,

Ireland,

28th July, 1963.

Dear Fong-ying,

Just a note to offer my congratulations to you on having matriculated, and especially on having received a Distinction in English Literature. I was very pleased with the latter, as you are the first of my pupils (in six years’ teaching) to get one. However, you certainly deserved this reward for your unremitting efforts.

I am rather doubtful about what I am going to write next. I have a vague idea that getting a Distinction entitles one to some sort of University grant – nothing very large, a reduction of fees or suchlike – but, under the circumstances you mentioned to me, it might be of help. I think you should check with Fr. Cryan on this point. I would be grateful if you could let me know then what your financial position is. Should the above not be the case, there may be other ways of raising the fees.

Please give my congratulations to any of the others you meet. I was very sorry that ... and ...* went down, they seemed certain to get it.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O’Flanagan

x x x

(*two surnames withheld by me)

(No. 2: 11th September, 1963)

“Farlton,”

O’Connell Terrace,

Limerick,

Ireland,

11th September, 1963.

Dear Fong-ying,

Many thanks for your letter. It was most kind of you to tell about yourself, though, naturally, I was distressed to hear of your illness.

I must apologise for delaying to reply to you. At present, I am involved in interviews, medical checks, passports, health certificates, and the rest of the usual red tape involved in getting a position abroad. So far I have turned down three or four offers, as I am anxious to get a post in a region where there is a Chinese community.

Could you let me know as soon as possible if you are fixed up about H. K. U. yet?

Yes, I can sympathise with the difficulty you mentioned regarding Virginia Woolf’s essays. It is very hard to appreciate criticism of a book one hasn’t read ; and Mrs. Woolf covers (to make the matter even more difficult) an extremely wide range. If you are interested in finding more about Virginia Woolf, the Kowloon or Victoria British Council library has a good book: “The Bloomsbury Group” (A.K. Johnstone) : but rather advanced. A reliable little work (many books on her are incomprehensible) is “Virginia Woolf “ (A.D. Moody), in “Writers and Critics” series, published by Oliver and Boyd of London. This is the most recent work on her.

Hoping you are taking a well-earned rest,

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

x x x

(No. 3: 25th October, 1963)

“Farlton,”

O’Connell Terrace,

Limerick,

Ireland,

25th October, 1963.

Dear Fong-ying,

I was delighted to hear that you succeeded in getting to H. K. U., and that most of your problems have been solved. It is good that Christopher Yu is in your group : he is a very pleasant and hard-working person. I presume Daniel Lee was another of the 1962 Wah Yan Matriculation class who entered this year. In Second Arts you should find Peter Lee (Yip-wah) and Paul Yeung (Yu-ping) ; the latter is specialising in English and would probably be of assistance to you with advice about the course, and so forth.

It is good that you have joined some societies, provided you do not get tied up too much in them, as the main aim of a university is to develop every student’s personality. Usually one finds Second Year the most convenient for taking more part in societies, as the examination at the end of that year is not so important as First Arts and Finals. However, from what I have heard of H. K. U., there is not much likelihood of any society having too many meetings ! Everybody is conscious of the need to study : American colleges go to the other extreme, I fear.

I was disturbed to hear that you have had to borrow your texts, as this is rather awkward at times. So I would like to contribute in a small way to help overcome this problem ; hence the enclosed chit, which should be handed in at the Mongkok Branch of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank within the next two to three weeks. Please do not feel embarrassed or unwilling to accept this. I myself would never have got to the university if I had

not had the good luck to win a scholarship donated by our city council : so I have been on the look-out, ever since I began teaching, for cases in which I might be of some little help to deserving (intellectually, that is) students whose financial circumstances are not too good. I am only sorry the sum is so small. However, I hope to contribute something similar at the start of your second and third years, if all goes well. I would be grateful, incidentally, if you did not mention to anyone outside your immediate family the above matter.

Hoping you are not finding the work too difficult,

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

x x x

(No. 4, typed: 14th December, 1963)

"Farlton,"

O'Connell Terrace,

Limerick,

Ireland,

14th December, 1963.

Dear Fong-ying,

Just a note to thank you for your last letter, and to wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I was delighted to hear that you are feeling better ; but please don't overdo things.

"A Passage to India" is one of those books that only begins to make an impression on the third reading --- or so I found. One of the difficulties is the omission of a great number of "He said" or "She replied," as Forster intends one to know who's speaking from the tone of what is said : but this is a difficult technique to catch on to at first. The relationships are not really so confused : the second reading should help you to isolate the primary characters --- Fielding, Aziz, Adela, Mrs. Moore, Prof. Godbole --- from the secondary ones --- the Turtons, Callendar, Macbride, Miss Derek, the Nabob --- and from the occasional background ones that figure, both Indians and English. Note, for example, that Forster has one character called Turton and another named Burton : this is a deliberate move to indicate how similar the English in Chandrapore were to each other (or perhaps, how difficult it was for the Indians to distinguish one Englishman or woman from another). Have you read the excellent introduction to the Everyman's Library edition by Peter Burra (Paul Yeung has a copy of it, I think)? I myself wrote an essay on this book, but it is at present stored away with most of my luggage : when I take up my next post in the Spring, I shall try to send you on a copy of this. The hardest part of the novel, I find, is understanding the third

part. In my edition, Forster states that the three parts represent respectively “the Cold Weather, the Hot Weather, and the Rains, which divide the Indian Year.” “Temple” also falls in the Hindu side of the picture, just as “Mosque” represents the Mahometans, and “Caves” (Forster is rather unkind here ! but then, he is an atheist) the Christians or English residents in India. A good way of getting to understand and appreciate the Third Part would be to answer for oneself this question : “The dramatised version of ‘A Passage to India’ (1960) omitted Part III : to what extent did this alter the theme and purpose of Forster’s story?” As regards modern poetry, a good help would be Burton’s “Criticism of Poetry” which I used a little with you in class. It is difficult but sound.

When I was leaving, Professor Blunden was due to retire.

Has he been granted an extension?

With renewed good wishes from

Yours sincerely,

(Signature)

(Patrick O’Flanagan)

x x x

(No. 5: 12th February, 1964)

“Farlton,”

O’Connell Terrace,

Limerick,

Ireland,

12th February, 1964.

Dear Fong-ying,

It is about time that I answered your letter ! However, the delay was not wholly my fault. A new Technical College opened here in January ; the English lecturer wrote to say he could not take up the position until mid-February ; so I was asked to take over in the interval. A day or two later, I received definite word of my appointment to the staff of Sophia University in Tokyo ; between teaching, and preparing for going abroad again, I have not had a moment to spare ! I hope to leave for Tokyo next week, but still do not know if I shall manage to get to Hong Kong on the way, or not. Meanwhile, in case you don’t hear from me before April, when I am due in Japan, my address from that month on will be :

Sophia University,

7, Kioicho,

Chiyoda-ku,

Tokyo.

Between now and April, I shall be on the high seas, and therefore unavailable !

I intended to copy out Burra’s introduction to the “Passage,” but found that this is copyright. However, the essay first appeared in a periodical, “The Twentieth Century and After” (November, 1934) --- this may be the one to which you referred in your letter. As regards histories of literature, those small enough (or cheap enough) to have for reference are all more or less of the Ifor Evans kind ; the good ones usually

occupy several volumes ! (Of course, there are excellent ones on individual periods.) The Pelican "Outline Guide" (7 vols.) is sometimes excellent, sometimes completely baffling ; Legouis & Cazmian (1 vol.) is highly rated, but is rather poor on the Moderns. I am sorry I can suggest nothing better at present.

With best wishes, and hoping to hear from you in Tokyo

(unless I am lucky enough to get to H.K.),

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

x x x

(No. 6: 3rd May, 1964)

Sophia University,
7, Kioi-cho,
Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo.

3rd May, 1964.

Dear Fong-ying,

My apologies for taking so long to answer your letter ! I am taking some time to adjusting myself to the part of a lecturer instead of a teacher. Besides, I have five courses altogether --- four in Modern Literature, and one in Victorian. Our lectures last for ninety full minutes each --- that is too long, in my opinion --- I should prefer two lectures (in each case) of forty-five minutes each. The students are divided into Japanese, who have day lectures, and International (mainly Americans and Chinese), who have night lectures. I have three courses with the Japanese, and here have (sic) the arrangement of the courses. With one group, I am doing (this term) "A Passage to India" and an anthology of poems, short stories, plays and essays from Kipling to Dylan Thomas ; with the second, Maugham's "Of Human Bondage" and Orwell's "Animal Farm" ; with the third, Galsworthy's "The Man of Property." Next term I have in mind "Mrs. Dalloway" and possibly "A Room with a View." I should be most grateful if, after the examinations, when you are free again, you would copy out and send to me a list of the full English Literature syllabuses, from First Arts to B.A. , that have been studied at H.K. U. during the past five years (I don't want you to go to great inconvenience, however : you should find them in the current and past College calendars.)

As regards the tests, do not be discouraged. I recall getting something like C- (!) for my first test at College. I was most dejected, but did very well indeed at the end of

the year. So I feel sure you have no need to worry. As regards Joyce's book, by the way, you were quite correct in wondering whether Joyce had to reject the call of country and religion. Actually, Joyce's antagonism towards the Jesuits resulted from the famous "pair of spectacles" scene, which he describes in the book. He felt he had been punished without cause, and perhaps he had : but so has almost every schoolboy during his time at school, yet he is usually sensible enough to forget about it. He certainly does (not*) let the incident disrupt his whole life as Joyce did! On the other hand, there may be some justification for Joyce feeling that he could not develop as an artist if he lived in Ireland, because of the intermixture of politics and literature at this time ; yet a writer like T.C. Murray could write very fine plays in which politics play (sic) no part ; while Yeats and O'Casey fused politics with culture successfully in their work. My own impression of Joyce has been that he was a neurotic seething with resentment against injuries that were either imaginary or had been brooded over excessively by him.

We, too, had a lecture by Miss Bradbrook, and Prof. Blunden took part in a discussion on Shakespeare. The students are to present "Macbeth" and "Othello" later this month.

I hope you are successful in being elected to the post in the Chinese Society. I have been asked here to join the Japan-Ireland Friendly Society, founded last year.

Wishing you the best of success in your examinations,

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

x x x

(*my addition)

(No. 7: 31st July, 1964)

Sophia University,

7, Kioi-cho,

Chiyoda-ku,

Tokyo.

Japan,

31st July, 1964.

Dear Fong-ying,

Many thanks for your letter of the third of June. I am especially grateful to you for going to the trouble of writing out the syllabuses for me (I thought you would be able to obtain printed ones). They should prove most useful, as I am trying to get the courses here in line with those of other universities. There is some possibility of doing this in the International Division, where I am getting some of my own way (!!); but the Japanese section of the university is quite chaotic. There seems to be no co-operation whatever between the professors and lecturers. Everyone seems to teach just what he likes! The result is, in some cases, emphasis on totally or comparatively unimportant writers (e. g. Jack London or Chesterton), to the neglect of others. As far as I can understand, I am the first person here to put E.M. Forster on the English course! Incidentally, when your lecturers deal with novels, do they ask you to read the whole book beforehand so that they can talk about it as an entity; or do they allot so many chapters per lecture, and talk about those particular ones? This problem is causing me quite some thought at present.

I hope you do well in your examination. I have heard from H.K. U. that you are very highly thought of by the staff of the English Department --- so I think you could stop worrying so much. Do have a good rest during the holidays. I myself shall not be leaving Tokyo this summer, but I may do some writing. Besides, I am trying to learn Japanese.

The oral side bores me, but I enjoy trying to write the (Chinese) characters --- though, as yet, I am familiar only with seventy ! Strange to say, the Katakana syllabary (Japanese characters), though far fewer and simpler, fail to remain in my memory at all ! Excluding my own name (see back of envelope).

I do think, if you can possibly do so, that you would be advised to take the special course in tragedy. Apart from its intrinsic interest and value, the course would introduce you to aspects of literature (e.g. the nature of drama, the purpose of tragedy, the inter-relationship between literature and life, the 'social' aspects of such literary forms as the 'problem' play, etc.) that would provide a solid and useful background to the rest of the course, and to literature in general (including Chinese literature). The texts set provide a bird's-eye view of European tragedy in general (though I noted the omission of Corneille and/or Racine, possibly because these writers lose so much in translation), thus expanding considerably the range of the English Literature course. But I may be prejudiced in advising you thus, firstly because, while at college, I myself undertook a similar course privately as a side-interest ; and secondly because I am to introduce in January a similar bird's-eye view of English poetic development, examining in one term the techniques of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Goldsmith, Burns, Blake, Wordsworth, Tennyson, the Rossettis, the War Poets of 1914, and the present Poet Laureate* --- not a perfect list, I fear, but at least not lacking in variety! (Note : if you have a few spare hours, read Masefield's "Reynard the Fox," the nearest approach to Chaucer since the latter's day --- though on a much smaller scale, of course.)

There is likelihood of a serious drought here, that could have an adverse effect on the Olympic Games. The weather is hot but pleasant, at least out-of-doors ; inside is rather sultry.

Please remember me to any former members of your Upper Sixth group that you happen to meet.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

x x x

(*John Masefield)

(No. 8: 25th October, 1964)

Sophia University,

7, Kioi-cho,

Chiyoda-ku,

Tokyo.

Japan,

25th October, 1964.

Dear Fong-ying,

It is about time I answered your last letter.

My apologies ! What with the most trying summer, two series of examinations in September (what a time to hold them !) and the excitement of the Olympic Games, I did not get an opportunity until now.

First, let me congratulate you heartily on your splendid results. You certainly deserved them. How is this year's courses going? If you want to read Chaucer but have not time to disentangle his English, I suggest the modern "translation" by Neville Coghill in the Penguin Classics.

Secondly, many thanks indeed for your summary of the lecturers' methods at Hong Kong University. I gave twelve or thirteen lectures on "A Passage to India," including an introductory one, eight or nine on the book in detail, and three final ones on "The Character of Mrs. Moore," "The Problem of Part III" (i.e. Is it necessary?), and "Mr. Forster's Style," respectively. The examination papers came in four weeks ago (I had asked quite simple questions --- about H.K. "A" level standard in H.S.C.*). I have glanced through them, and they are so appallingly bad I haven't had the courage since to start assessing their merit in marks ! Oh, dear !

As lectures continued during the Olympic Games, I did not get an opportunity to attend them, but I watched an occasional event on television. Everything went

off much more smoothly than had been anticipated – for which we all are heaving huge sighs of relief !

I believe Mr. Hardy, late of H.K.U., is lecturing now at St. Paul's University here, but so far I have not met him.

Please remember me to any former students of mine you may meet, also to Mrs. Visick**.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

P.S. Do not overwork yourself teaching in the night-school.

x x x

(*Higher School Certificate, later replaced by the "A" level; ** Mrs. Mary Visick, a teacher in the English Department at H.K.U., my tutor for two years)

(No. 9: 8th November, 1964)

Sophia University,

7, Kioi-cho,

Chiyoda-ku,

Tokyo.

Japan,

8th November, 1964.

Dear Fong-ying,

Your letter recounting your difficulties brought back memories of a rather similar tussle re time-tables that I had with a lecturer in my university days --- but with no success whatever ! However, to return to a serious look at the problem : do remember that you cannot afford to over work or over-strain yourself in any way. While I quite understand and appreciate your anxiety about getting the best out of the English course --- and I still recall my own frustration at being prevented from taking English Literature for my degree by the above-named lecturer, and for an extremely trivial reason indeed – I feel you may have taken on an overdose of assignments. Much as you naturally dislike missing the seventeenth century, it would always be possible to study it for oneself after graduating. Actually, the ideal situation might be if you could “sit in” on, say, the seventeenth-century course (that is, attend lectures without the burden of sitting for an examination), while taking the six papers recommended by Mr. Green. It would depend, however, on how willing Mrs. Visick might be to agree to such an arrangement. Also, I am not too happy at your having to “make up” the classes that clash. In fact, if it were possible even at this stage, I should suggest that you revert to Mr. Green’s original scheme. I am not trying to discourage you --- far from it ! --- but human nature is weak, and a course of even mild opposition to the Head of a Department could --- I merely sound a note of warning here ! –

lead him (quite unconsciously, too !) – to take a harder position towards a student in the final examination than the student merited --- the difference between A and B, for instance, or First-Class and Second-Class Honours. A reversion to the assigned scheme, especially if you could keep up your interest in the seventeenth century on a “sit-in” basis, might, though more immediately frustrating, be in the long run more rewarding --- in more senses than one. Remember that the purpose of specialising in a subject at university is not to cover everything but (a) to train your critical faculties ; and (b) to build up a background re authorities on authors, modern attitudes to these, etc. Furthermore, the stress on periods tends to change. In this century, for example, universities concentrated first on the Victorians, then on the Metaphysicals. Now, the emphasis is on the Moderns ; hence Contemporary English. I am glad you enjoy that course. I think “The Bell” very fine, though I consider it also has faults (e.g. Does the Abbess, for all her reputed wisdom, really affect anyone in a concrete way? ; and the character of Nick, whose motives still seem to me indecipherable). Perhaps “The Unicorn,” Miss Murdoch’s latest, may rank higher : it appears more fully integrated and is a splendid modern exploitation of the “Gothic” novel, while the motivation is not obscure ; yet it lacks a certain general symbolic impression carried by “The Bell.” “Lucky Jim” irritated me : but then I may find it hard to “stomach” a lecturer as undevoted as Jim : hence, conversely, my liking for C. P. Snow’s “The Masters” and Angus Wilson’s “Anglo-Saxon Attitudes.” Both concern dedicated professors. (I spent the summer coming up-to-date on the contemporary novel.)

My apologies for making this letter almost a sermon : but I interpreted your one as a request for my views on your present academic “set-up.” And is learning French really necessary at this precise time?

With best wishes --- and do take things a little easier!

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O’Flanagan

(No. 10: 17th December, 1964)

Sophia University,

7, Kioi-cho,

Chiyoda-ku,

Tokyo.

Japan,

17th December, 1964.

Dear Fong-ying,

Just a note to wish you a very happy Christmas and a successful New Year. I hope your health is improving all the time and that you are not overworking.

I have just finished setting the courses in Modern Literature for the next academic year. The standard is still too low here (even at graduation level !) to put on what I should like --- namely, the equivalent of the Mod. Lit. paper you did in your first year --- but I have made a beginning, with an anthology of poems and short stories, Shaw's "Arms and the Man," Eliot's "The Family Re-union," and Strachey's "Eminent Victorians" (probably two out of the four biographies will be covered). I have omitted the novel, since this has been covered by one this year in the pre-graduation group (next year's pre-graduation class will be expected to cover Bennett's "Riceyman Steps," Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway," Forster's "Howard's End" and Cary's "Mister Johnson".) In the International Division I am giving lectures on Shakespeare's Tragedies (using Bradley as a 'background' text) and on fourteen British poets from Chaucer to the present day. Also, I have instituted a tutorial on the English novel : in one term the students will have to cover the following at the rate of one book per week. Fielding's "Joseph Andrews," Austen's "Pride and Prejudice," Dickens's "Great Expectations," Bronte's "Wuthering Heights," Eliot's "Mill on the Floss," Hardy's "Mayor of Casterbridge," Wells's "Tono-Bungay," Woolf's "To the Lighthouse," Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers" and Golding's "Lord of the Flies." Incidentally, the lists you sent proved most helpful

in the above matter. I am working on them at present re a course in the eighteenth century
proposed for the I. D. later in the year.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

x x x

(No. 11: 4th April, 1965)

Sophia University,
7, Kioi-cho,
Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo.
Japan,
4th April, 1965.

Dear Fong-ying,

Many thanks for your letter, and also for forwarding "The Chimes,"* which I was most pleased to get, especially as it was more or less dedicated to Professor Blunden. The articles on "The Masquers" recalled to me the occasions on which I had seen their performances in Hong Kong.

With regard to your difficulties concerning extra-curricular activities, I would like to make three comments, which may (or may not !) be helpful:

(1) Many students find themselves in the same predicament in their Second Year.

(2) The Second Year, of its nature, is less "tense" than First or Third, because there is no major examination at the end of it. It is too, (if I may judge from my own experience !) the most enjoyable one. Also, you will find, I suspect, that you can withdraw gracefully into semi-retirement when you enter on your final year.

(3) I agree wholeheartedly with your views on the duties of a university student --- but don't "go overboard," as the Americans say! It is good to hear that the student body of H.K.U. is "waking-up" --- but I trust they do not reach the snake-dancing or embassy-burning stage!

I hope your health has not been a drawback ; judging from your letter, it has been in a "static" condition recently. But I hope you get into either H.K.U. or the Chinese University.**

Our final exams. finished yesterday --- I should be correcting two sets now, but am not yet "in the mood" (an important factor !) --- and lectures re-commence on the twelve --- so no Easter vacation ! My seminar on the English Novel went well, though two of the nine students dropped out. Also satisfactory were S.'s Tragedies, with Bradley as a supplementary text. But there was trouble over my Modern Literature course with the graduating year. Three students who failed my paper were, in consequence, unable to graduate. I was requested to set another paper, and duly did so : but only one of the three got through. Unfortunate, but what could be done? The passing mark is 50%, and their marks (based on an aggregate of the final exam., the autumn exam., and themes) were in the low thirties ; and, due to late arrival of two texts, etc., I had kept the standard very low indeed.

However, I have the same course in the coming year, and have tried to raise the standard. Texts are (1) MODERN ENGLISH WRITERS (anthology of poems and short stories) ; ARMS AND THE MAN ; RIDERS TO THE SEA ; THE FAMILY RE-UNION ; Strachey's EMINENT VICTORIANS. I have tried to get closer to the kind of course (B, Paper IV) that you took in your first year. Also, many of the graduating class will participate in a parallel course on the modern novel (transferred from the pre-graduation class, as was the case last year), and the texts are : RICEYMAN STEPS (Bennett), HOWARDS ENDS, MRS. DALLOWAY and MISTER JOHNSON. With the English Language graduating class I am going to read MR. PERRIN AND MR. TRAILL (Walpole), ANIMAL FARM, INVITATION TO THE WALTZ (Lehmann), and either THE JACARANDA TREE (Bates) or THE GOOD EARTH (Pearl Buck --- American). In the International Division I take S.'s Comedies (one term only, so I shall try to cover five : M.N.D., T.N., A.Y.L.I., M.A.A.N.***, and THE TEMPEST) and a two-term course in English drama, the first part to cover ABRAHAM AND ISAAC ; SECOND SHEPHERD'S PLAY ; EVERYMAN ; DOCTOR FAUSTUS ; MACBETH ; VOLPONE ; and SAMSON AGONISTES. (Note Any questions on these latter plays would be acceptable ! --- at your leisure, however !) I am also to take over half way through the year on a course entitled ENGLISH THINKERS --- what it involves,

I do not know as yet !

I am now in sole charge of the International Division Eng. Lit. Department,
and have established a programme of fourteen courses, covering everything from Chaucer down ;
to wit :

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| (1) Age of Chaucer | (8) Shakespeare's Comedies |
| (2) 16 th Cent. excluding Shakespeare | (9) " Histories and Sonnets |
| (3) 17 th " | (10) " Tragedies |
| (4) 18 th " | (11) English Drama until 1642 |
| (5) Romantics | (12) " " 1642-1900 |
| (6) Victorians | (13) " " from 1900 |
| (7) Modern Age | (14) The English Novel |

Not wholly satisfactory, I admit, because of the transitory nature of students and staff ---
and the minor fact that I am the only member of the Department ! --- but I hope to make
some courses (e.g. 1, 2, 5, 10) compulsory for those students "majoring" in Eng. Lit.

If only I had similar authority at the Japanese end, where every lecturer teaches what he wants
or what he is an expert in (in my case, I am only filling up a much-needed gap), and all is chaos
(in some cases, two or three lecturers may be teaching the same text to the same group of
students because these men are all experts on Henry James, for example !)

On that note I shall close.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

x x x

(* "The Chimes" was a student publication; ** maybe a confusion in his mind; *** A Midsummer Night's
Dream, Twelfth Night, As You Like It, Much Ado About Nothing)

(No. 12: 8th August, 1965)

Sophia University,
7, Kioi-cho,
Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo.
Japan,

8th August, 1965.

Dear Fong-ying,

Many thanks for your letter of the twenty-eighth of June. Yesterday, I finished taking a month-long course in our summer session : Japanese literature in translation. That is why I did not write to you before now. My object in taking this course was to discover the differences between the two literatures, Japanese and English, especially in the field of the novel, so that I might deduce from them possible difficulties encountered by my own students. But the main result seems to have been : a profound realisation of how boring a lecturer can be, and some subsequent soul-searching about my own presentation in class !!!

I am glad that you took some time off in various forms of relaxation, especially in view of the amount of "work" you wished to accomplish before the beginning of the new academic year. (The inverted commas above were used merely to imply that your efforts would not be devoted to actual work for examinations.) As for the problems you mentioned : doubtless they are irritating, but the fact that you have them shows that you are profiting from university life --- unlike so many who go through college with their eyes, ears and minds shut ! (cf. Hamlet's words on "What is a man, if the main purpose of his time be but to sleep and feed?" etc.)

However, as regards your doubts about academic work, you should not forget the

enormous influence of teachers on the development of their pupils : how much greater, therefore, is that of university lecturers ! Besides, even a university career does not involve much academic (“ivory tower” type of thing) work until its later stages, and even there, the extent of a person’s withdrawal from “reality” (and which is more “real” --- passing on a cultural tradition or getting political power?) depends on himself. But, in the final analysis, I believe that a man should choose as his career that job, academic or otherwise, for which (a) he is well fitted and (b) has a definite predilection. Nothing else --- not even salary --- matters compared with these two points. I know of several extremely intelligent teachers who loathe their jobs, but who are anxious for the salaries and prestige involved. On the other hand, at least one of my acquaintances who wished to teach had to give it up through lack of the needed qualities (not academic qualifications). To decide on the best solution between what one would like to do and what one can do, is much more important than a general choice between academic and political. (Besides, it is far easier, anyway, to transfer from academic to political life, than to perform the reverse action.)

Forgive me for rambling on thus ; as you said, I am not fully acquainted with the nature of your problems. Yet the above suggestions are basic ones, I feel. Incidentally, I met a Mr. Andrew Wong (黃宏發)*, a delegate to the International Students’ Conference here, and he was full of your praises.

Tomorrow I hope to start preparing material for next term (starting 6th September). Luckily, I am feeling much better. Also, I have made friends with a First Year student, who has read most of the English novels (in Japanese, however). I am going on a visit to his family later this month.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O’Flanagan

x x x

(*The Chinese characters were written in his own hand. Andrew Wong entered H.K.U. in 1963; but because he was elected President of the Students’ Union and served his term, he graduated in 1967.)

(No. 13: 13th December 1965)

Sophia University,
7, Kioi-cho,
Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo.
Japan,

13th December 1965.

Dear Fong-ying,

Just a note to wish you a very enjoyable
Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Many thanks indeed for sending me "The Quill."*

I hope to pass it on to our E. S. S. I liked your article "What is Catharsis?," also Yeung Kam Chow's**
essay on communism. (One of my texts each year has been Orwell's "Animal Farm," and one of
my notes have laid much stress --- like Yeung --- on the divergences between Lenin's version of
communism and Marx's theory of it.)

I have decided to leave Japan next July, and
am trying to get a new post. If possible, I should like a Commonwealth University, preferably
in a country where there are Chinese. But if I cannot obtain a suitable position in this field, I may
return to teaching. Time will show what is to be.

Excuse the brevity of this : I have to send over one
hundred letters !

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

x x x

(*The Quill was a student publication; **Yeung studied in the Chinese Department, H.K.U., 1963-66.
The article was in English.)

(No. 14: 31st January, 1966)

Sophia University,
7, Kioi-cho,
Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo.
Japan,

31st January, 1966.

Dear Fong-ying,

Thank you for your letter and New Year greetings. I intended to write for the 23rd --- Chinese New Year --- but this is our final month of the academic year, and the whole world (of Sophie) is in "a state of chassis"* ! However, late though it is, I still wish you Kung Hei Fat Choy ! And I hope that you had some rest and relocation during the New Year break.

I have no doubt that you will qualify for a studentship, and, in that case, you should have no hesitation about accepting it. Apart from other reasons, being a tutor would (a) help you to decide definitely what you would like to do, and, (b) get your foot in, so to speak, university circles. Do not worry about your apparent lack of knowledge --- the university is basically a place where the seeds of future interest are sown, a jumping-off ground. But I agree wholeheartedly with your attitude towards taking a government department post : it is, for the most part, a dead end --- as far as future studies are concerned, I mean.

Now for a surprise. I am returning to Wah Yan in September (D.V.).** You are probably aware that the Japanese and I did not get on together ; and I also suspect that I am better suited for teaching than for lecturing --- in temperament, that is, not in academic qualifications ! At any rate, I want to get back among the Chinese for

a few more years. Then, if I feel it would be wise, I can transfer again to university level in H.K. ,
should a vacancy occur.

So I am looking forward to meeting yourself
and other old students in the autumn. I hope all goes well in your finals : don't overwork !
I shall be here until the end of June, so write again when the mountain has been passed in May.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

x x x

(*"The whole world is in a terrible state of chassis" is an expression found in Sean O'Casey's play "Juno
and the Paycock." It means something like "in a state of disorder or ruin."; **Deo Volente – God willing)

(NO. 15: 20th June 1966)

Sophia University,
7, Kioi-cho,
Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo.
Japan,

20th June 1966.

Dear Fong-ying,

Many thanks for your letter. I feel sure you will do better than you imagine in the finals, and I hope you are relaxing now. I hope you get either the studentship, or one of the posts for which you have applied. If there is anything I can do to help --- recommendations, or such --- please let me know.

I must apologise for being so remiss in my correspondence with you from Japan. Really, at times I have quite a struggle here not to despair entirely. But I have only two weeks left ; then, after a short holiday in Ireland, I shall be going Hong Kong-wards. My address during July and August will be :

“Farlton,”
O’Connell Terrace,
Limerick,
Ireland.

We end this term on the third of next month.

I have been lecturing on the Romantic Movement, and gave a tutorial on the novel. During the latter course, the students read a book each week, covering “Tom Jones,” “Pride and Prejudice,” “Great Expectations,” “Wuthering Heights,” “The Mill on the Floss,” “The Mayor of Casterbridge,” “The Man of Property,” “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,” “The Rainbow,” and “The Horse’s

Mouth." I am thinking of making my tutorial notes the basis for a text-book. Incidentally, I shall be starting with Lower Sixth in Wah Yan and taking them through Upper Sixth. The texts appear stiffer than those in your time, with 17th /18th cents. predominating, and emphasis on poetry rather than novels. Not too satisfactory, in my opinion ; but --- bash on regardless !

Mr. Kong is "flat-searching" on my behalf at present.

I hope he is successful, even if it means living in Victoria. But I want something bigger than one room : I am rather tired of ten years of living in such restricted circumstances ! (Is this a sign that I am growing old ?!!!)

My brother sat for his First Arts examinations recently, and I am awaiting the results. He intends to major in English, I think.

With best wishes !

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

P.S. At this stage, I suggest you drop calling me "Mr." and use my first name !

x x x

(No. 16: 4th July, 1966)

Sophia University,

Tokyo.

4th July, 1966.

Dear Fong-ying,

I don't know which piece of news gave me the greater pleasure --- your excellent results (achieved as they were against an almost insurmountable obstacle) or your restoration to health. Heartiest congratulations on both accounts ! I hope you pull off the hat-trick now by getting the studentship !

In two days' time I leave Tokyo en route for a holiday in Ireland, where I want to do nothing but rest. I am very exhausted, both physically and emotionally. Then, in late August, back to Hong Kong, where we shall have the pleasure of meeting again.

My address in Ireland is :

"Farlton,"

O'Connell Terrace,

Limerick,

Ireland.

With renewed good wishes !

Yours sincerely,

Patrick

x x x

(No. 17: 5th September, 1966)

#404, Y.M.C.A.,
Salisbury Road,
Kowloon.

5th September, 1966.

Dear Fong-ying,

Just a note to inform you of my
arrival here. Classes began at Wah Yan to-day.

Please get in contact with me when
you are free --- preferably at the week-end. I am looking forward to seeing you again.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

x x x

(No. 18, typed: 13th September, 1966)

Wah Yan College,
Waterloo Road,
Kowloon.

13th September, 1966.

Dear Fong-ying,

Many thanks for your letter. Is your post temporary
or permanent?*

I am sorry you had difficulty in trying to contact me :
the week-end is an awkward time for telephone calls.

If you are free on Saturday (17th), could you come to
dinner at the Y.M.C.A. any time between 7:00 and 7:30 p.m.? If I am not in the lobby, ask for me
at the reception-desk : I am in room 404.

Please confirm if you can come.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick O'Flanagan

x x x

(*I began teaching in Choi Hung Estate Catholic Secondary School as a "permitted teacher" in September,
hence the question, I think.)

--- E N D ---