

October 31, 1960

Dear José,

Your letter arrived on my birthday, as I was absorbed in somber and morose reflection on my age, mortality, and unwed state --- mostly the last, since I had always considered twenty-four the absolutely final age for young ladies to marry, and I am now twenty-three. Anyhow, fifty percent of the women in America now marry before nineteen, or something like that. I do realize that marriages are not necessarily arrived at by statistical or chronological calculations, but these are the facts. Moreover, I do not want to marry any of the people whom I already know, and I cannot possibly marry anyone whom I do not know. There it is, the situation is dire.

But one does not ordinarily come to Paris to marry, so I have decided to put the problem aside for a while. Yes, you are right, neither Benveniste nor Levi-Strauss has ever worked on anything which I have studied, and even if I had it all to do over again, I would not devote my time to Sanscrit-Coptic-Etruscan derivations of the esoteric sort. But I did once write a paper, with your guidance, on mythology, and Levi-Strauss teaches a course on that subject. I think that I shall take it, because it is probably very interesting and not even too remote from Comparative Literature or Philosophy. As for my commitments to Harvard, I have none; they simply do not recognize the courses here, although the Comparative Literature department will give me credit for at least a half year's work no matter what I do.

Yet, when and if I go back to Cambridge, there is an exam, and here is what I am "responsible for": German Literature from its beginnings, French Literature and English Literature and One Other Literature since 1750. I must also be able to read a classical language. Now, I studied German at Bryn Mawr, and I have read a few things in English, and I think I can read Latin alright. The Other Language is rather a question mark; ~~NECESSARILY~~ I just have to be able to read it a little bit, and ~~NECESSARILY~~ I may work on it back in Cambridge. So it seems that, according to Harvard, what I should study here is French Lit. since 1750, and what I should read on the side are those other things. I shall, therefore, take a course here in the influence of

Rilke on French Lit. The rest I shall have to read at breakfast, see at the theater, and absorb by osmosis.

From the above rather garbled description should emerge the fact that I am taking two concrete steps: one Rilke and the Locals, one Comparative Mythology (which really interests me). There is, however, ~~an~~ complication: to enter the University here, I had to inscribe myself for a degree, and the only one that I could hope to get equivalences for is The Diplome des Études Supérieures en Philosophie. I don't, however, know which philosophy courses to take, since they all sound inviting. Could you tell me something about those 'philosophic matters'? I hope all this does not sound like the sheerest diletantism. I owe some intensive literary exposure this year to Radcliffe, some work in philosophy to the Fulbright Commission, and maybe the mythology falls somewhere in between; anyhow, it seems to me like an interesting and instructive, if not very specialized, program. As for the Diplome, I wonder if I can possibly earn it. (I should rewrite the above in more coherent form, but I am not sure I could manage it.)

With daiquiris, intriguing sounding writings, calligraphy, weddings, and travels, you sound quite awesomely busy. At one of the receptions here I met a student, I do not know his name, who is devoting his career to the study of you, but as I was asking him more about it, someone on the other side of the room must have moved, and the reception was so crowded that we all had to move. I found myself talking to a bio-physicist, and could not resume my former conversation. Further shifts in the crowd introduced me to a student of Verlaine and an archaeologist.

I live in a hotel on the Ile-St-Louis, overlooking the Seine, which is not as chic as it sounds, since the hotel is rather ramshackle and has only its view and location to recommend it. In the room next door to me lives a novelist with a mustache; he must be very prolific since he types day and night, and the length of this letter is partially attributable to his diligent example.

When I am not trying to fathom the university and student restaurant system, I enjoy Paris enormously, since it is, after all, a bigger city than even Cambridge, and there are always superb plays and concerts going on. At home, I

never could attend, in one evening, a manifestation for paix en Algerie, another manifestation for Algerie Francais, a clash between the two manifestations (one Bryn mawr girl, Bunny Dexter, did not leave soon enough, stood watching the fighting, and was hit over the head a few times by the police), and, on the other side of town, the opening of the Marquis de Cuevas' last ballet, at which a baron appeared in a sedan chair over a rose-petal strewn sidewalk. I am really very enthusiastic about it all, but I shall end this letter here, lest it extend into ~~xxx~~ several volumes.

Many thanks for your letter. I wish you were teaching some courses here.

Sincerely,

*Serata*

*doe you related to Fabiola? Do you read Paris Match? Is it not a scandal that those Kelly served tea by and Cranberry sauce to De Gaulle in Monaco? I improve my French by discussing these important matters.*

5-XI-60.