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**Modern Oriental Prose: Texts and Tasks for
Critical Readers, Thinkers and Writers**

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**Modern Oriental Prose: Texts and Tasks for Critical Readers,
Thinkers and Writers:**
*тексти та завдання для розвитку вмінь
усного та писемного мовлення*

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ПЕРЕДМОВА

Читанню приділяється велика увага в методиці навчання іноземних мов, оскільки воно є основним джерелом отримання інтелектуальної й естетичної інформації, ефективним способом доповнення й розширення лексико-граматичного активу, засобом формування комунікативної та професійної компетенцій, і найголовніше - імпульсом, що сприяє розвитку творчої активності та критичного мислення студентів. Актуальним є поєднання оволодіння іноземною мовою з вивченням культур народів світу, оскільки це сприяє соціальному збагаченню світогляду студентів, розвитку вмінь знаходити те спільне, що лежить в основі всіх культур, підготовці до здійснення полікультурної комунікації, розвитку у студентів почуття поваги до «чужої» культури.

Домашнє читання у вищій мовній школі - є обов'язкове для всіх студентів, додаткове по відношенню до основного підручника, значне за обсягом читання з метою отримання й переробки змістової інформації. Крім того, домашнє читання - це ефективна форма організації самостійної роботи студентів у вивченні іноземних мов, оскільки тексти як засоби літературного мистецтва сприяють індивідуальному саморозвитку, саморозкриттю й самореалізації особистості. Отже, мета посібника полягає у формуванні полікультурної компетентності та вдосконаленні комунікативних умінь усного та писемного мовлення на базі автентичних культурно-країнознавчих текстів для домашнього читання. Запропоновані тексти розкривають ментальність східних народів через авторські художні твори, інтерв'ю з письменниками та літературними критиками, біографічні відомості з життя відомих письменників та поетів.

Посібник містить завдання, які, з одного боку, сприяють формуванню навичок та розвиток умінь мовленнєвої діяльності, а з іншого - розвитку умінь користуватися культурологічною інформацією в полікультурному спілкуванні. Відповідно, і система вправ для формування полікультурної комунікативної компетентності в читанні переслідує подвійну мету: формування мовленнєвої компетенції в читанні та формування культурно-країнознавчої компетенції при читанні.

англомовних текстів.

Посібник складається з 7-ми текстових розділів, кожен з яких має чітко виписану структуру і культурологічний зміст:

- *передтекстові завдання*, мета яких полягає, по-перше, в усуненні лексичних труднощів читання, по-друге, у формуванні й розвитку прогностичних навичок та вмінь і, по-третє, у розширенні культурно-країнознавчого кругозору студентів у контексті полікультурного спілкування;
- *завдання для читання тексту* з розумінням представленої в ньому основної культурологічної інформації;
 - *післятекстові завдання*, які, націлені, по-перше, на засвоєння лексико-граматичного матеріалу, в тому числі, з культурно-країнознавчим компонентом, та його використання в усному й писемному мовленні; по-друге - на розвиток творчої активності й критичного мислення студентів на матеріалі прочитаного.

Зі структури завдань бачимо, що їх основним призначенням, з одного боку, є формування навичок та розвиток умінь мовленнєвої діяльності, а з іншого - розвиток умінь користуватися культурологічною інформацією в полікультурному спілкуванні. Відповідно, і система вправ для формування полікультурної комунікативної компетенції в читанні переслідує подвійну мету: формування мовленнєвої компетенції в читанні та формування культурно-країнознавчої компетенції при читанні англомовних текстів.

Посібник адресований студентам-орієнталістам і всім, хто цікавиться літературною творчістю.

Unit 1

Chinese Literature



Macao, former Portuguese colony in China

In this unit you will read:

- Wolfgang Kubin on Contemporary Chinese Literature (DW interview)
- Lu Xun *A Madman's Diary* (excerpt)
- In His Own Words (interview with Bei Dao)
- Bei Dao *Thirteen Poems*

Wolfgang Kubin on Contemporary Chinese Literature

Before You Read

1. Find out whether you know the meanings of the words and phrases that will be used in the interview. Use a dictionary if necessary.

a. Find 3-4 synonyms to the following adjectives.

e.g. contemporary – modern, existing, current, present, up-to-date, up-to-the -minute

renowned decent gutless

b. Write a short explanation for each of the phrases. Use each of these phrases in a sentence.

e.g. a "pretty girl writer" – a female writer whose beautiful appearance indicates the quality of her work

There are also the works of other authors such as the "pretty girl writers" like Mian Mian and Wei Hui.

- to hold sth in contempt
- sb's vistas are limited
- to add more flames to the discussion
- sth is decaying slowly

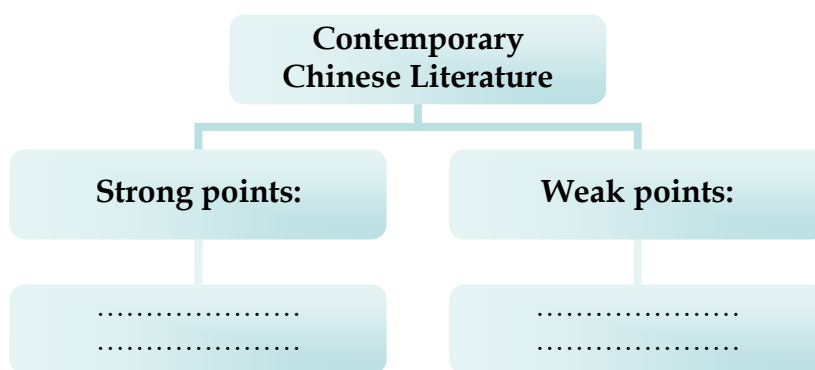
2. Read the context sentences, and fill in the gaps with prepositions if necessary. Then, read the interview and check yourselves.

- Wolfgang Kubin expressed his views ___ the Chinese Writers Association, the problems ___ contemporary Chinese literature, the problems ___ Chinese writers and how they can step ___ the world stage, and also ___ certain specific writers and works.
- If one is a genuine Chinese writer, he will not join ___ this Writers Association.

- If he became a great writer only after joining, then something is wrong ___ him.
- We have a voice ___ Germany. But where is the voice ___ China? None.

3. Try to imagine how such a quotation like *"Contemporary Ukrainian literature is trash; the Ukrainian writers despise each other; the Ukrainian writers are gutless ..."* makes you feel. Discuss it with a small group or write about it in your journal.

Read the interview with the internationally famous German Sinologist Wolfgang Kubin, and bring to light strong and weak points of contemporary Chinese literature, determined by him.



Wolfgang Kubin on Contemporary Chinese Literature

Bonn University Professor of Chinese Studies Wolfgang Kubin is one of the most renowned Sinologists in Germany, especially on the presentation and study of contemporary Chinese literature. In this DW (Deutsche Welle) interview, he expressed his views on the Chinese Writers Association, the problems in contemporary Chinese literature, the problems of Chinese writers and how they can step onto the world stage, and also about certain specific writers and works.

DW: In the recent Writers Association meeting in Beijing, Tie Ning was elected chairperson. This is the third chairperson in the history of the Writers Association after Mao Dun and Ba Jin. I understand that you were in China at the time. What are your views?

Kubin: I was in China at the time, but I don't know much about this event. In any case, it can be said that all of the Chinese writers that I know hold the Writers Association in contempt. For us Sinologists, it is a matter of indifference if there is a new chairperson for the Writers Association.

DW: Can it be said that the new Writers Association president does not need to be the most famous and respected person in the manner of Mao Dun and Ba Jin?

Kubin: This Writers Association serves no purpose whatsoever. You can ask all the writers in mainland China and none of them will voluntarily talk about the Writers Association. Nobody. Not a single person. If one is a genuine Chinese writer, he will not join this Writers Association. If he became a great writer only after joining, then

something is wrong with him. Generally speaking, good writers cannot possibly be associated with the Writers Association.

DW: I understand you wrote a report recently about the problem of existence of Chinese literature in the 21st century. Can you summarize the contents of this report? That is to say, tell us about the problems that exist for Chinese literature over the past few years.

Kubin: I can only mention certain existing problems that I feel exists in 20th century Chinese literature. If we divide Chinese writers into those before or after 1949, we will find out that writers before 1949 were pretty good with foreign languages – Eileen Chang, Lin Yu-tang, Hu Shi, they could all write in foreign languages. Some of the authors (such as Lu Xun) could handle two foreign languages without any problems. After 1949, you basically cannot find a Chinese writer who can speak a foreign language. Therefore, he cannot use another language system to examine his own work. Also, he cannot read the works written in foreign languages. He can only read foreign works translated into Chinese. Therefore, Chinese writers have very poor understanding of foreign literature. Many of the pre-1949 writers believed that when they learnt foreign languages, they would enrich their own writing. But if you ask a contemporary Chinese writer why he won't learn a foreign language, he will say that a foreign language can only ruin his mother tongue. I guess this is why there are no great writers after 1949 and why these writers do not compare to the pre-1949 writers. This is where the problem lies. This is a very important issue.

DW: Do you think that this is the sole problem, or the main problem?

8

Kubin: This is the biggest problem. When Chinese writers go overseas, they have to rely on the Sinologists because they can't even speak a word of foreign language. They rely on us completely. Their works need us to translate them from Chinese.

DW: You must have some understanding about certain recent works from China in recent years, such as *Wolf Totem*.

Kubin: *Wolf Totem* is fascism according to us Germans. That book causes China to lose face.

DW: There are also the works of other authors such as the "pretty girl writers" like Mian Mian and Wei Hui.

Kubin: You must be joking. That is not literature. That is trash.

DW: Do you think that there is any more decent Chinese literature in recent years?

Kubin: There is some in Chinese poetry. There are some good, even excellent, writers of Chinese poetry, such as Ouyang Jianghe, Sichuan, Zhai Yongming and others. There are many others. That is for sure.

DW: China is talking about "Poetry is dead." Why do you think?

Kubin: How can poetry be dead? Even if China is dead, then poetry will be dead in China but it will continue to "live on" in Germany. If a Chinese poet comes to

Germany and we organize a reading, there will be at least 50 people, 100 people in attendance. We will certainly publish their collected poems. Contemporary Chinese writers have published many poetry books in German. Chinese literature will not die in Germany.

DW: How does contemporary Chinese poetry compare to the 1980's with people like Bei Dao and Yang Lian?

Kubin: That is hard to compare. But I think that the poets from both the 1980's and 1990's are excellent. They have their own visions, they have their own language, etc. Personally, I obviously like Bei Dao and that group of people. But I am older and I should consider the younger readers. Those younger readers are likely to prefer the 1990's poets such as Wang Jiaxin, Ouyang Jianghe, Zhai Yongming and so on.

DW: The Chinese Writers Association has a project now to select 100 Chinese works and translate them into foreign languages so that Chinese literature can go out into the world. What do you think about this plan? Is it meaningful?

Kubin: This may mean something in the United States, but it is meaningless in Germany. Basically, we have already translated the Chinese literary works into German. All Chinese writers of any era already has German editions of their works. We do not need that help. But it is a problem in the United States where the need exists because they have done fewer translations.

DW: China has been developing economically very rapidly. Some people say that China will surpass the United States economically in the next 30 or 40 years. The United States got prosperous in the last century. But we know that they prospered not only economically, but also in literature, cinema, popular music and so on. They had a tremendous impact on the world. Do you believe that China will also develop rapidly in literature to match its economic standing?

Kubin: That depends on the Chinese people themselves. The people who despise Chinese culture and Chinese literature are not us foreigners, but the Chinese people themselves. The problem is with China itself. The Chinese people do not assign any important position to their own culture and literature.

DW: How are we supposed to understand this? Why do you say that the Chinese people do not assign any importance to their literature?

Kubin: Let me give you a very simple example. Last year, I published in Germany a history of 20th century Chinese literature. When the Chinese intellectuals who are all my friends (including the writers) heard that I was writing such a history, they said, "Don't write it. There is nothing good. It is all trash."

DW: That is to say, they despise themselves. Or perhaps one should say that they despise each other.

Kubin: Yes, you are very correct. They despise each other.

DW: When Gao Xingjian won the Nobel Prize, the reaction from China was more negative than positive. Is that what happened? Do you feel that China will get another Nobel Prize in Literature?

Kubin: The Nobel Prize in Literature is secondary. You have to write poorly in order to win. If you write well, you will never win it. Therefore the Nobel Prize in Literature is also trash.

DW: If you have to say a few words to Chinese writers, what will you say?

Kubin: They should learn to master their mother tongue well. Most Chinese writers have poor mastery of Chinese. Also, they should learn first on how to write. The problem there is tremendous for Chinese writers. But their basic problem is that their awareness is poor and their vistas are limited. It seems as if they live in a small room and they are afraid to open their eyes to look at the world. Therefore, China does not have its own voice, at least in terms of literature. There are writers everywhere in Germany, they represent Germany and they speak for the German people. Therefore we have a voice for Germany. But where is the voice for China? None. It does not exist. The Chinese writers are gutless. Basically, they have no guts.

DW: That is to say, there is no such person like Lu Xun.

Kubin: Yes, you are very correct. Lu Xun was representative. But can show me such a Chinese writer today? There isn't any.

DW: Does this have anything to do with the environment inside China? That is to say, the ideological control.

Kubin: Possibly. But you cannot keep saying that the conditions do not allow you. I feel that a Chinese writer should not keep saying that historical conditions do not allow him to do this or that. I consider that to be a joke. In order for a writer to become a genuine writer, he should not consider what difficulties he might encounter. He should speak out just like Lin Yu-tang and Lu Xun did back then.

DW: From the 20th century to the 21st century, which Chinese writers would you consider to be great?

Kubin: This is premature to say. You have to wait at least 50 years later and then you look back to see which (if any) are great. Lu Xun is definitely great. There are others before 1949. There are definitely none from 1949 to now.

DW: Bei Dao and Gao Xingjian are not?

Kubin: Gao Xingjian? Don't joke about this. Bei Dao could be considered great, because he is courageous. But you should not forget that he is only 50 years old.

*Deutsche Welle via Priest Liu, in translation
Available at http://zoniaeuropa.com/culture/c20061214_1.htm*

After You Read

1. Did you find any shocking words Wolfgang Kubin used in his attack on Chinese literature? If so, make a list of his unfriendly remarks.

2. Read the six brief comments on the interview. Label each **Supporter, Opponent, Neutral**. Whose opinion do you share? Give reasons.

Comment 1

He is right. Contemporary literature is trash. If you don't inherit and extend the elegant ancient language, where would you get any literary characteristics? Such is our contemporary literature. This is the age of trash for both ancient and contemporary literature.

Comment 2

He should not have said 'contemporary literature.' He should have said 'most of the recent literature,' especially after the 1980's.

Chinese literature is decaying slowly. That's true.

Comment 3

What nonsense! Foreigners are unqualified to discuss Chinese literature! Chinese literature is a special form of expression under a special system. Anyone who advocates "The Death of Literature" fails to understand the present conditions. It is meaningless to compare the weak points of China with the strong points of foreign nations! Chinese culture has its own accumulated achievements. Even if it not satisfactory, it will get better. This is just a process!

Comment 4

Good criticisms. Literary trash. All they know is to call each other names all the time, without any producing anything for the world to read. They can't even win a Nobel Prize.

Comment 5

It is too severe to say Chinese literature is "trash". But I agree that there is a sense that it is turning into trash.

Comment 6

Many people are worried about contemporary literature. We read "plagiarism is a fad," we read "write with your body," we read about "the plum blossom style," we read about "the writer begging for money in the street," we read about "the Internet writer joining the Writers' Association," we read about "Chinese writers miss out on Nobel Prize," we read about the "fourteen states of death of contemporary Chinese literature," we read that the "21st century has no literary classics" ... and we begin to think that contemporary Chinese literature is dead. The distortion of what Germany Sinologist Wolfgang Kubin said is just adding more flames to this discussion.

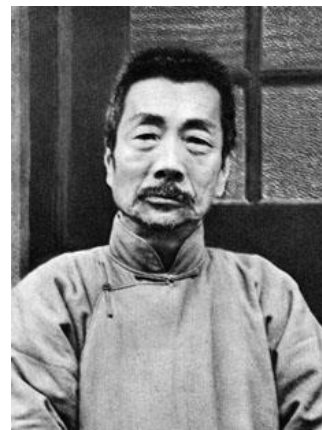
Lu Xun "A Madman's Diary"

Before You Read

1. In his interview Professor Kubin said that Lu Xun was "the voice for China" before 1949, "he was representative", "he was great". Have you read any works written by Lu Xun?
2. To better understand Lu Xun's story "*A Madman's Diary*" read this analytical summary.

"*A Madman's Diary*" was Lu Xun's first short story. It was written in the modern Chinese vernacular.

The bulk of the story is in the form of a diary, which must have been borrowed from Nikolai Gogol. Lu Xun translated Gogol's works into Chinese, and must have been familiar with his "*Diary of a Madman*". Inspired by Gogol, he created a very Chinese story which offers an ironic look at Chinese history, culture and social structure.



Lu Xun
(1881-1936)

Lu Xun describes cannibalistic feudal society of pre-revolution China, where the strong devour the weak.

The main character of the story is the loner in the crowd – a madman whose insanity is highly doubtful. He understands that everyone around is a cannibal, and that he has to resign to his fate – to be eaten.

Nevertheless, he summons up courage to speak to a man-eating society, and makes an attempt to convert people from cannibalism to a higher level of humanity.

The story ends with a poignant plea to "save the children" with their unspotted purity, for they have not yet eaten human flesh. This seems to imply that the cannibalism in Lu Xun's story is symbolic.

While reading the diary, find some other symbols.¹ What do you suppose they represent?

12

A Madman's Diary *Lu Xun*

Two brothers, whose names I need not mention here, were both good friends of mine in high school; but after a separation of many years we gradually lost touch. Some time ago I happened to hear that one of them was seriously ill, and since I was going back to my old home I broke my journey to call on them, I saw only one, however, who told me that the invalid was his younger brother.

"I appreciate your coming such a long way to see us," he said, "but my brother recovered some time ago and has gone elsewhere to take up an official post." Then, laughing, he produced two volumes of his brother's diary, saying that from these the nature of his past illness could be seen, and that there was no harm in showing them to an old friend. I took the diary away, read it through, and found that he had suffered from *a form of persecution complex*². The writing was most confused and *incoherent*³, and he had made many wild statements; moreover he had omitted to

¹ **Symbol** – is a word or object, which can be visible or invisible, and which stands for another word or object (e.g. *Able and Cain stand for good and evil, humility and pride*).

² *a form of persecution complex* – одна з форм манії переслідування

³ *incoherent* – неясний, нескладний, непослідовний

give any dates, so that only by the colour of the ink and the differences in the writing could one tell that it was not written at one time. Certain sections, however, were not altogether disconnected, and I have copied out a part to serve as a subject for medical research. I have not altered a single illogicality in the diary and have changed only the names, even though the people referred to are all country folk, unknown to the world and of no consequence. As for the title, it was chosen by the diarist himself after his recovery, and I did not change it.

I

Tonight the moon is very bright.

I have not seen it for over thirty years, so today when I saw it I felt in unusually high spirits. I begin to realize that during the past *thirty odd years*⁴ I have been in the dark; but now I must be extremely careful. Otherwise why should that dog at the Chao house have looked at me twice?

I have reason for my fear.

II

Tonight there is no moon at all, I know that *this bodes ill*⁵. This morning when I went out cautiously, Mr. Chao had a strange look in his eyes, as if he were afraid of me, as if he wanted to murder me. There were seven or eight others, who discussed me in a whisper. And they were afraid of my seeing them. All the people I passed were like that. The fiercest among them grinned at me; whereupon *I shivered from head to foot*⁶, knowing that their preparations were complete.

I was not afraid, however, but continued on my way. A group of children in front were also discussing me, and the look in their eyes was just like that in Mr. Chao's while their faces too were *ghastly pale*⁷. I wondered what *grudge*⁸ these children could have against me to make them behave like this. I could not help calling out: "Tell me!" But then they ran away.

I wonder what grudge Mr. Chao can have against me, what grudge the people on the road can have against me. I can think of nothing except that twenty years ago I trod on Mr. Ku Chiu's⁹ account sheets for many years past, and Mr. Ku was very displeased. Although Mr. Chao does not know him, he must have heard talk of this and decided to avenge on him, so he is conspiring against me with the people on the road, But then what of the children? At that time they were not yet born, so why should they eye me so strangely today, as if they were afraid of me, as if they wanted to murder me? This really frightens me, it is so *bewildering*¹⁰ and upsetting.

I know. They must have learned this from their parents!

III

⁴ *thirty-odd years* – більше тридцяти років

⁵ *this bodes ill* – це обіцяє щось неладне

⁶ *I shivered from head to foot* – Я весь тремтів (від голови до п'ят)

⁷ *ghastly pale* – мертвотно-блідий

⁸ *grudge* – злість, ненависть

⁹ *Ku Chiu means "Ancient Times."* Lu Xun had in mind the long history of feudal oppression in China.

¹⁰ *bewildering* – спантеличений

I can't sleep at night. Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it.

Those people, some of whom *have been pilloried*¹¹ by the magistrate, slapped in the face by the local gentry, had their wives taken away by *bailiffs*¹², or their parents driven to suicide by creditors, never looked as frightened and as fierce then as they did yesterday.

The most extraordinary thing was that woman on the street yesterday who *spanked her son*¹³ and said, "Little devil! I'd like to bite several mouthfuls out of you to work off my feelings!" Yet all the time she looked at me. I gave a start, unable to control myself; then all those green-faced, long-toothed people began to laugh *derisively*¹⁴. Old Chen hurried forward and dragged me home.

He dragged me home. The folk at home all pretended not to know me; they had the same look in their eyes as all the others. When I went into the study, they locked the door outside *as if cooping up a chicken or a duck*¹⁵. This incident left me even more bewildered.

A few days ago *a tenant*¹⁶ of ours from Wolf Cub Village came to report the failure of the crops, and told my elder brother that a notorious character in their village had been beaten to death; then some people had taken out his heart and liver, fried them in oil and eaten them, as a means of increasing their courage. When I interrupted, the tenant and my brother both stared at me. Only today have I realized that they had exactly the same look in their eyes as those people outside.

Just to think of it sets me shivering from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet.

They eat human beings, so they may eat me.

I see that woman's "bite several mouthfuls out of you," the laughter of those green-faced, long-toothed people and the tenant's story the other day are obviously secret signs. I realize all the poison in their speech, all the daggers in their laughter. Their teeth are white and glistening: they are all man-eaters.

It seems to me, although I am not a bad man, ever since I trod on Mr. Ku's accounts it has been *touch-and-go*¹⁷. They seem to have secrets which I cannot guess, and once they are angry they will call anyone a bad character. I remember when my elder brother taught me to write compositions, no matter how good a man was, if I produced arguments to the contrary he would mark that passage to show his approval; while if I excused evil-doers, he would say: "Good for you, that shows originality." How can I possibly guess their secret thoughts – especially when they are ready to eat people?

¹¹ *to pillory* – виставити на осміяння, засудити, бути прив'язаним до стовпа

¹² *bailiff* – судовий пристав

¹³ *to spank one's son* – шльопати сина (долонєю)

¹⁴ *derisively* – саркастично, з іронією

¹⁵ *as if cooping up a chicken or a duck* – узаперті (за зачиненими дверима) наче курча або качка

¹⁶ *a tenant* – орендар, наймач

¹⁷ *touch-and-go* – швидкий, темпераментний (про людину); небезпечний, ризикований (про справу)

Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it. In ancient times, as I recollect, people often ate human beings, but *I am rather hazy about it*.¹⁸ I tried to look this up, but my history has no chronology, and scrawled all over each page are the words: "Virtue and Morality." Since I could not sleep anyway, I read intently half the night, until I began to see words between the lines, the whole book being filled with the two words – "Eat people."

All these words written in the book, all the words spoken by our tenant, gaze at me strangely with an enigmatic smile.

I too am a man, and they want to eat me!

IV

In the morning I sat quietly for some time. Old Chen brought lunch in: one bowl of vegetables, one bowl of steamed fish. The eyes of the fish were white and hard, and its mouth was open just like those people who want to eat human beings. After a few mouthfuls I could not tell whether the slippery morsels were fish or human flesh, so I brought it all up.

I said, "Old Chen, tell my brother that I feel quite suffocated, and want to have a stroll in the garden." Old Chen said nothing but went out, and presently he came back and opened the gate.

I did not move, but watched to see how they would treat me, feeling certain that they would not let me go. Sure enough! My elder brother came slowly out, leading an old man. There was a murderous gleam in his eyes, and fearing that I would see it he lowered his head, stealing glances at me from the side of his spectacles.

"You seem to be very well today," said my brother.

"Yes," said I.

"I have invited Mr. Ho here today," said my brother, "to examine you."

"All right," said I. Actually I knew quite well that this old man was the executioner in disguise! He simply used the pretext of feeling my pulse to see how fat I was; for by so doing he would receive a share of my flesh. Still I was not afraid. Although I do not eat men, my courage is greater than theirs. I held out my two fists, to see what he would do. The old man sat down, closed his eyes, fumbled for some time and remained still for some time; then he opened his shifty eyes and said, "Don't let your imagination run away with you. Rest quietly for a few days, and you will be all right."

Don't let your imagination run away with you! Rest quietly for a few days! When I have grown fat, naturally they will have more to eat; but what good will it do me, or how can it be "all right"? All these people wanting to eat human flesh and at the same time stealthily trying to keep up appearances, not daring to act promptly, really made me nearly die of laughter. I could not help roaring with laughter, I was so amused. I

¹⁸ *I am rather hazy about it* – Я доволі смутно собі це уявляю.

knew that in this laughter were courage and integrity. Both the old man and my brother turned pale, *awed by my courage and integrity*¹⁹.

But just because I am brave they are the more eager to eat me, in order to acquire some of my courage. The old man went out of the gate, but before he had gone far he said to my brother in a low voice, "To be eaten at once!" And my brother nodded. So you are in it too! This stupendous discovery, although it came as a shock, is yet no more than I had expected: the accomplice in eating me is my elder brother!

The eater of human flesh is my elder brother!

I am the younger brother of an eater of human flesh!

I myself will be eaten by others, but none the less I am the younger brother of an eater of human flesh!

V

These few days I have been thinking again: suppose that old man was not *an executioner in disguise*²⁰, but a real doctor; he would be none the less an eater of human flesh. In that book on herbs, written by his predecessor *Li Shih-chen*²¹, it is clearly stated that men's flesh can be boiled and eaten; so can he still say that he does not eat men?

As for my elder brother, I have also good reason to suspect him. When he was teaching me, he said with his own lips, "People exchange their sons to eat." And once in discussing a bad man, he said that not only did he deserve to be killed, he should "have his flesh eaten and his hide slept on. . . ." ²². I was still young then, and my heart beat faster for some time, he was not at all surprised by the story that our tenant from Wolf Cub Village told us the other day about eating a man's heart and liver, but kept nodding his head. He is evidently just as cruel as before. Since it is possible to "exchange sons to eat," then anything can be exchanged, anyone can be eaten. In the past I simply listened to his explanations, and let it go at that; now I know that when he explained it to me, not only was there human fat at the corner of his lips, but his whole heart was set on eating men.

16

VI

Pitch dark. I don't know whether it is day or night. The Chao family dog has started barking again.

The fierceness of a lion, the timidity of a rabbit, the craftiness of a fox. . . .

VII

I know their way; they are not willing to kill anyone outright, nor do they dare, for fear of the consequences. Instead they have banded together and set traps everywhere, to force me to kill myself. The behaviour of the men and women in the

¹⁹ *awed by my courage and integrity* – наляканий моєю сміливістю та відвертістю

²⁰ *an executioner in disguise* – удаваний, замаскований кат

²¹ *Li Shih-chen, a famous pharmacologist (1518-1593), author of Ben-cao-gang-mu, the Materia Medica.*

²² *he should "have his flesh eaten and his hide slept on. . . . These are quotations from the old classic Zuo Zhuan.*

street a few days ago, and my elder brother's attitude these last few days, make it quite obvious. What they like best is for a man to take off his belt, and hang himself from a beam; for then they can enjoy their heart's desire without being blamed for murder. Naturally that sets them *roaring with delighted laughter*.²³ On the other hand, if a man is frightened or worried to death, although that makes him rather thin, they still nod in approval.

They only eat dead flesh! I remember reading somewhere of a hideous beast, with an ugly look in its eye, called "hyena" which often eats dead flesh. Even the largest bones it grinds into fragments and swallows: the mere thought of this is enough to terrify one. Hyenas are related to wolves, and wolves belong to the *canine species*²⁴. The other day the dog in the Chao house looked at me several times; obviously it is in the plot too and *has become their accomplice*²⁵. *The old man's eyes were cast down*²⁶, but that did not deceive me!

The most deplorable is my elder brother. He is also a man, so why is he not afraid, why is he plotting with others to eat me? Is it that when one is used to it he no longer thinks it a crime? Or is it that he has hardened his heart to do something he knows is wrong?

In cursing man-eaters, I shall start with my brother, and in *dissuading*²⁷ man-eaters, I shall start with him too.

VIII

Actually, such arguments should have convinced them long ago. . . .

Suddenly someone came in. He was only about twenty years old and I did not see his features very clearly. His face was wreathed in smiles, but when he nodded to me his smile did not seem genuine. I asked him "Is it right to eat human beings?"

Still smiling, he replied, "When there is no famine how can one eat human beings?"

I realized at once, he was one of them; but still *I summoned up courage*²⁸ to repeat my question:

"Is it right?"

"What makes you ask such a thing? You really are . . . fond of a joke. . . . It is very fine today."

"It is fine, and the moon is very bright. But I want to ask you: Is it right?"

He looked *disconcerted*²⁹, and muttered: "No...."

"No? Then why do they still do it?"

²³ *to roar with delighted laughter* – сміятися, підкочуватися від задоволення

²⁴ *canine species* – сімейство ікlastих

²⁵ *has become their accomplice* – став їхнім співучасником

²⁶ *The old man's eyes were cast down* – Старий опустив очі

²⁷ *to dissuade* – переконувати, відговорювати

²⁸ *I summoned up courage* – Я зібрався з силами, мобілізував волю

²⁹ *disconcerted* – збентежений

"What are you talking about?"

"What am I talking about? They are eating men now in Wolf Cub Village, and you can see it written all over the books, in fresh red ink."

His expression changed, and he grew ghastly pale. "It may be so," he said, staring at me. "It has always been like that. . . ."

"Is it right because it has always been like that?"

"I refuse to discuss these things with you. Anyway, you shouldn't talk about it. Whoever talks about it *is in the wrong!*"³⁰

I leaped up and opened my eyes wide, but the man had vanished. I was soaked with perspiration. He was much younger than my elder brother, but even so he was in it. He must have been taught by his parents. And I am afraid he has already taught his son: that is why even the children look at me so fiercely.

IX

Wanting to eat men, at the same time afraid of being eaten themselves, they all look at each other with the deepest suspicion. . . .

How comfortable life would be for them if they could rid themselves of such obsessions and go to work, walk, eat and sleep at ease. They have only this one step to take. Yet fathers and sons, husbands and wives, brothers, friends, teachers and students, *sworn enemies*³¹ and even strangers, have all joined in this conspiracy, discouraging and preventing each other from taking this step.

18

X

Early this morning I went to look for my elder brother. He was standing outside the hall door looking at the sky, when I walked up behind him, stood between him and the door, and with exceptional poise and politeness said to him:

"Brother, I have something to say to you."

"Well, what is it?" he asked, quickly turning towards me and nodding.

"It is very little, but I find it difficult to say. Brother, probably all primitive people ate a little human flesh to begin with. Later, because their outlook changed, some of them stopped, and because they tried to be good they changed into men, changed into real men. But some are still eating – just like reptiles. Some have changed into fish, birds, monkeys and finally men; but some do not try to be good and remain reptiles still. When those who eat men compare themselves with those who do not, how ashamed they must be. Probably much more ashamed than the reptiles are before monkeys.

*In ancient times Yi Ya boiled his son for Chieh and Chou to eat; that is the old story*³². But actually since the creation of heaven and earth by Pan Ku men have been

³⁰ *to be in the wrong* – помилятися

³¹ *sworn enemies* – закляті вороги

³² *According to ancient records, Yi Ya cooked his son and presented him to Duke Huan of Chi who reigned from 685 to 643 B.C. Chieh and Chou were tyrants of an earlier age. The madman has made a mistake here.*

eating each other, from the time of Yi Ya's son to the time of *Hsu Hsi-lin*³³, and from the time of Hsu Hsi-lin down to the man caught in Wolf Cub Village. Last year they executed a criminal in the city, and a consumptive soaked a piece of bread in his blood and sucked it.

They want to eat me, and of course you can do nothing about it *single-handed*³⁴; but why should you join them? As man-eaters they are capable of anything. If they eat me, they can eat you as well; members of the same group can still eat each other. But if you just change your ways immediately, then everyone will have peace. Although this has been going on since time immemorial, today we could make a special effort to be good, and say this is not to be done! I'm sure you can say so, brother. The other day when the tenant wanted the rent reduced, you said it couldn't be done."

At first he only smiled cynically, then a murderous gleam came into his eyes, and when I spoke of their secret his face turned pale. Outside the gate stood a group of people, including Mr. Chao and his dog, all craning their necks to peer in. I could not see all their faces, for they seemed to be masked in cloths; some of them looked pale and ghastly still, concealing their laughter. I knew they were one band, all eaters of human flesh. But I also knew that they did not all think alike by any means. Some of them thought that since it had always been so, men should be eaten. Some of them knew that they should not eat men, but still wanted to; and they were afraid people might discover their secret; thus when they heard me they became angry, but they still smiled their cynical, *tight-lipped smile*³⁵.

Suddenly my brother looked furious, and shouted in a loud voice:

"Get out of here, all of you! What is the point of looking at a madman?"

Then I realized part of their cunning. They would never be willing to change their stand, and their plans were all laid; they *had stigmatized me as a madman*³⁶. In future when I was eaten, not only would there be no trouble, but people would probably be grateful to them. When our tenant spoke of the villagers eating a bad character, it was exactly the same device. This is their old trick.

Old Chen came in too, in a great temper, but they could not stop my mouth, I had to speak to those people:

"You should change; change from the bottom of your hearts!" I said. "You most know that in future there will be no place for man-eaters in the world.

"If you don't change, you may all be eaten by each other. Although so many are born, they will be wiped out by the real men, just like wolves killed by hunters. Just like reptiles!"

³³ A revolutionary at the end of the Ching dynasty (1644-1911), Hsu Hsi-lin was executed in 1907 for assassinating a Ching official. His heart and liver were eaten.

³⁴ *single-handed* – одноосібно, без сторонньої допомоги

³⁵ *tight-lipped smile* – прихована посмішка

³⁶ *had stigmatized me as a madman* – поставили на мені клеймо божевільного

Old Chen drove everybody away. My brother had disappeared. Old Chen advised me to go back to my room. The room was pitch dark. The *beams and rafters*³⁷ shook above my head. After shaking for some time they grew larger. They piled on top of me.

The weight was so great, I could not move. They meant that I should die. I knew that the weight was false, so I struggled out, covered in perspiration. But I had to say:

"You should change at once, change from the bottom of your hearts! You must know that in future there will be no place for man-eaters in the world"

XI

The sun does not shine, the door is not opened, every day two meals.

I took up my chopsticks, then thought of my elder brother; I know now how my little sister died: it was all through him. My sister was only five at the time. I can still remember how lovable and pathetic she looked. Mother cried and cried, but he begged her not to cry, probably because he had eaten her himself, and so her crying made him feel ashamed. If he had any sense of shame. . . .

My sister was eaten by my brother, but I don't know whether mother realized it or not.

I think mother must have known, but when she cried she did not say so outright, probably because she thought it proper too. I remember when I was four or five years old, sitting in the cool of the hall, my brother told me that if a man's parents were ill, he should cut off a piece of his flesh and boil it for them if he wanted to be considered a good son; and mother did not contradict him. If one piece could be eaten, obviously so could the whole. And yet just to think of the mourning then still makes my heart bleed; that is the extraordinary thing about it!

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XII

I can't bear to think of it.

I have only just realized that I have been living all these years in a place where for four thousand years they have been eating human flesh. My brother had just taken over the charge of the house when our sister died, and he may well have used her flesh in our rice and dishes, making us eat it *unwittingly*³⁸.

It is possible that I ate several pieces of my sister's flesh unwittingly, and now it is my turn, . . .

How can a man like myself, after four thousand years of man-caring history – even though I knew nothing about it at first – ever hope to face real men?

XIII

Perhaps there are still children who have not eaten men? Save the children. . . .

³⁷ *beams and rafters* – балки й крокви

³⁸ *unwittingly* – ненавмисно, випадково

After You Read

1. As you may have noticed the story is rich in stylistic devices. The climax of the story is the madman's **dramatic monologue**³⁹ (see Section x). What ideas does it convey?

2. In the following context sentences, how does the diarist use **hyperbole**⁴⁰, **metaphor**⁴¹, **repetition**⁴², **symbol** to shape the mood?

- Just to think of it sets me shivering from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet. (Section III)
- I wonder what grudge Mr. Chao can have against me, what grudge the people on the road can have against me. I can think of nothing except that twenty years ago. (Section II)
- At that time they were not yet born, so why should they eye me so strangely today, as if they were afraid of me, as if they wanted to murder me? (Section II)
- "Little devil! I'd like to bite several mouthfuls out of you to work off my feelings!" (Section III)
- Pitch dark. I don't know whether it is day or night. (Chapter VI)
- His face was wreathed in smiles, but when he nodded to me his smile did not seem genuine. (Section VIII)
- "You should change; change from the bottom of your hearts!" I said. (Section VIII)
- The sun does not shine, the door is not opened, every day two meals. (Section IX)

3. Find and consider the use of **simile**⁴³ and **allusion**⁴⁴.

4. What can be rated an **antagonist**⁴⁵ in this story? Substantiate your idea.

5. Think about the plot of the story:

- a. How does the madman see other people? How do they treat him?
- b. What is he criticizing? Is this story about actual cannibalism?
- c. In Lu Xun's eyes, how is traditional Chinese society cannibalistic?
- d. Is the madman a cannibal, too, perhaps without knowing it?
- e. In Section IV, why does he vomit after eating a dish of fish?

³⁹ **Dramatic monologue** – a literary device that is used when a character reveals his or her innermost thoughts and feelings through a speech.

⁴⁰ **Hyperbole** – an extravagant exaggeration, which is used for emphasis or vivid descriptions (e.g. *I'm older than the hills*).

⁴¹ **Metaphor** – a type of figurative language, which is used to uncover new and intriguing qualities of the original thing that we may not normally notice or even consider important (e.g. *The man's arm exploded with pain*).

⁴² **Repetition** – a type of sound techniques, which is used to create a sense of pattern or form to emphasize certain elements in the mind of a reader (e.g. *Once upon a time there was an old man who lived in an old house*).

⁴³ **Simile** – a comparison used to attract the attention of the reader and describe sth in descriptive terms (e.g. *He looked like an insect scurrying among other insects*).

⁴⁴ **Allusion** – a reference in a literary work to a person, place or thing in history or another work of literature (e.g. *I doubt if Phaeton feared more – that time he dropped the sun-reins of his father's chariot and burned the streak of sky we see today...*)

⁴⁵ **Antagonist** – a character in a story that deceives, frustrates or works against the main character in some way. The antagonist doesn't necessarily have to be a person. It could be death, devil, an illness or any challenge that prevents the main character from living "happily ever after".

- f. Lu Xun was influenced by Darwin and Huxley's ideas on evolution. Are there references to such ideas in the story?
- g. How does Lu Xun apply the notion of evolution to the understanding of the human condition? What changes does he believe human beings must undergo? Why?
- h. What is the significance of the animal imagery in the story? What sorts of animals are alluded to? Why?
- i. What is the significance of the moon image? What is the madman able to see under the moon? Does the moon have anything to do with his madness?
- j. What is hidden in the darkness? Why is daylight, when there is no moon, depressing to the madman?
- k. What does the madman think of the doctor who comes to examine him? Is it significant that he is a doctor? Can a doctor be a cannibal? How?
- l. In *Section IX*, what makes people reluctant to take that "one little step"? What is the symbolic meaning of that step? What does Lu Xun want for the people to do?
- m. In *Section X*, what does Elder Brother fail to do that upsets the madman? What is it that Elder Brother claims can't be done? How does that explain the meaning of cannibalism?
- n. What is the significance of the concern with the death of madman's younger sister? Why is Elder Brother blamed for her death? Is she a symbol?
- o. In the last line, "Save the children..." an optimistic or pessimistic ending? Who will save them? From what?
- p. What is suggested when his brother says that the madman got better and went on to wait for official appointment? Is his brother telling the truth?
- q. What may have happened to the madman?
- r. What is the difference between "being eaten" and "getting cured of his madness"? Is the madman "eaten" either way?
- s. What do people do to each other that makes them into cannibals? Are we all cannibals in some respect?

6. Did you like the story? Write about it in your journal.

7. Develop your way with words:

a. In the diary some of the verbs – such as *look, say, come in* – have neutral power because they have direct meaning, and can be used in any context. The other verbs – such as *shiver, spank, coop up* – have special power, because they bear particular emphasis, and can be used in a special context. Divide the following verbs in two groups – those with neutral power and those with special power:

**grind, eat, learn, swallow, nod, work,
dissuade, walk, sleep, soak, suck,
reduce, peer in, stigmatize, struggle,
bleed**

b. You must have found several multi-word adjectives in the story – such as *long-toothed, green-faced, tight-lipped, single-handed*. Following the example, create more adjectives. Check yourselves with a dictionary or a teacher.

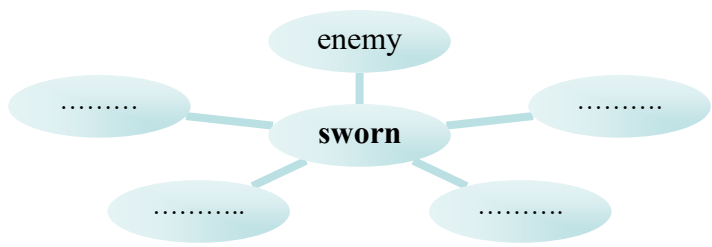
Long-
long-sighted – able to see things clearly only when they are quite far away;
long-winded – boring because it is too long
long-lived – living or lasting for a long time
long-drawn-out – lasting longer than necessary

Green-

Tight-

Single-

c. Using a dictionary, find other words that collocate with *sworn*. Use each of the collocations in a sentence.



e.g. Yet fathers and sons, husbands and wives, brothers, friends, teachers and students, *sworn enemies* and even strangers, have all joined in this conspiracy, discouraging and preventing each other from taking this step.

Bei Dao: Biography

Bei Dao (pseudonym of Zhao Zhenkai), one of China's foremost poets of the "misty school," was born in 1949 in Beijing. Both his father, an administrative cadre, and his mother, a medical doctor, came from traditional, middle-class Shanghai families. During the Cultural Revolution, Bei joined the Red Guard movement, expecting a spirit of cooperation between the Chinese Communist Party and the country's intellectual elite. Like many other middle-class youth, however, he soon became disillusioned with Chinese society, and was later sent to the countryside, where he became a construction worker. Living in total isolation in the mountains outside Beijing increased his youthful melancholy and prompted him and many of his contemporaries to explore a more spiritual approach to life⁴⁶. He experimented with "free verse" in a hermetic, semi-private language⁴⁷ characterized by oblique imagery and elliptical syntax. That linguistic style, in which subject, tense, and number are elusive and transitions are unclear⁴⁸, came to be called "*menglong shi*," or "misty poetry."⁴⁹



Bei Dao
Paris, 1992
Photo by Zhiping Wang

By 1974, Bei Dao had finished the first draft of his novella *Waves* and begun a sequence of poems. Those poems were to become a guiding beacon for the youth of the April Fifth Democracy Movement of 1976.

In December 1978, Bei Dao and Mang Ke published the first issue of China's first unofficial literary journal, *Jintian (Today)*, which survived until Beijing officials shut it down in 1980.

Widely treasured by those who participated in China's democracy movement, Bei Dao's poetry is marked by the effort to reveal the nature of the self, to identify both public and private wounds, to trust in instinctive perceptions, and to reach out to other afflicted souls. It depicts the intimacy of passion, love, and friendship in a society where trust can literally be a matter of life and death.

Bei Dao was forced into exile following the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989. He, along with other exiled writers and artists, has found a voice in a renewed version of *Jintian*, which was re-launched in Stockholm in 1990. "Ironically, it is...this...position of an exile that has given Bei Dao new insights... His experience has translated into three volumes of poetry, each of which has earned more critical acclaim than the one before."⁵⁰

Bei Dao was recently inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters as an "honorary member." His awards and honors include the Aragana Poetry Prize from the International Festival of Poetry in Casablanca, Morocco, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. He has been a candidate several times for the Nobel Prize in Literature, and was elected an honorary member of The American Academy of Arts and Letters. At the request of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, he traveled to Palestine as part of a delegation for the International Parliament of Writers.

Bei Dao was a Stanford Presidential lecturer and has taught at the University of California at Davis, the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, and Beloit College in Wisconsin. In 2006, Bei Dao was allowed to move back to China.

By Ramon H. Myers

Available at <http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/dao/index.html>

⁴⁶ Gleichman, Gabi. An Interview with Bei Dao // *Modern Chinese Literature*. – Vol. 9:2 (Fall 1996). –P. 388.

⁴⁷ Bei Dao (*Pei-Tao*). *The August Sleepwalker*. – London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1989. – P.11.

⁴⁸ *World Authors: 985-1990*. – New York: H.W.Wilson, 1995 – P. 51.

⁴⁹ *From the Beijing Spring of 1979 until the student uprisings of 1989 a new generation of poets flourished in China. Influenced by contemporary Western poets and modernist imagist techniques the Misty Poets challenged the Maoist artistic ideology of social realism. Their political protest and social commentary manifest itself largely through obscure and hermetic images and metaphors, a practice that resulted in the designation "Misty Poets." Some poets of the Misty School include: Bei Dao, Yang Lian, Shu Ting, Jiang He, Gu Cheng, Duo Duo, Mang Ke, Chou Ping, Xi Chuan, Zhang Zhen, Tang Yaping, Fei Ye, Bei Ling, and Ha Jin.*

⁵⁰ Wai, Isabella. Bei Dao's 'Theme Song' // *Explicator*. – Vol. 57:3 (Spring 1999). – P. 187.

In His Own Words: Interview With Bei Dao

Before You Read

1. Write a short explanation for each of the phrases. Use each of these phrases in a sentence.

e.g. **to make a living** – to receive as return for effort and especially for work done or services rendered

In order **to make a living** I started doing translations.

- to be struck by sth
- to be inimitable

2. What poetry means to you? Is it a way of understanding reality and changing the world? Do you see any connection between poetry and rebellion?

3. Can exile give a poet many opportunities? Demonstrate it with an example of a creative search of a poet of your choice?

Read the interview with Bei Dao, one of China's leading poets, and say what helped him gain thorough literary knowledge.

In His Own Words (interview with Bei Dao)

25

Gabi Gleichmann: Is poetry a way of understanding the world, understanding reality? Is that what poetry means to you?

Bei Dao: I see a connection between poetry and rebellion. Rebellion is a major theme of my generation. But I believe rebellion begins at the personal level, for instance, my rebellion against my father. Poetry is a form of rebellion against the decades of chaos in China

Gabi Gleichmann: Who are some of the poets who have influenced your poetry?

Bei Dao: I still remember how, on first reading the Chinese translation of Garcia Lorca in the 1970s, I was struck by his unique imagery and impeccable music. Poets of my generation (who were still underground at the time) tried to imitate him but eventually we gave up when we realized he was inimitable. There were of course other poets in the 'Generation of 1927,' such as Rafael Alberti, Vicente Aleixandre and Antonio Machado. They form what I call 'the golden chain of Spanish poetry.' At the beginning of this golden chain, we should add the Peruvian poet Cesar Vallejo. Though he did not belong to the 'Generation of 1927,' in spirit they were closely related. We feel the power of mystery in his *Trilce*, which, published in the same year as T.S. Elliot's *The Waste Land*, has long been considered a classic of modernist poetry.



These links of the golden chain in German poetry seem to me far less close than those I have found in Spanish poetry. There seems to be no ‘blood relation’ between my favorite German-speaking poets: Georg Trakl, Maria Rilke, and Paul Celan. Trakl and Rilke belong to the same generation, but the extremism of Trakl and the generous receptivity of Rilke create a sharp contrast.... Russian poetry, especially Romantic poetry of the 19th century, has always had a special significance for Chinese poets. Due to strict control over a long period of time, however, we were unable to read any modernist Russian poetry until the 1980s. Boris Pasternak, Osip Mandestam, and Gennadi Ajgi (Pasternak’s student) form a golden chain of pain and misery in Russian poetry.

In order to make a living, I started doing translations in the mid 1980s. My reading of modern Swedish poetry revealed to me the golden chain in Swedish Poetry: Gunnar Ekelof, Eric Lindergren, and Tomas Transtromer.

Of all the poets I mentioned earlier, I like Celan best because I think there is a deep affinity between him and myself in the way he combines the sense of pain with language experiments. He transforms his experience in the concentration camps into a language of pain. That is very similar to what I am trying to do. Many poets separate their experience from the language they use in poetry, but in the case of Celan there is a fusion, a convergence of experience and experimental language.....

Gabi Gleichmann: Let’s change the topic...I think exile gives you freedom but solitude is the price you pay....

Bei Dao: Though some writers would not admit it, I think there is a positive side to exile.... If exile is an endless journey, then it’s a journey through emptiness. It gives you new understanding about emptiness.....

Gabi Gleichmann: ...exile has done something to your work...

Bei Dao: ...I think exile has given me many opportunities to face the heart of darkness, which every human being must face. ... This path leading to the heart of darkness, some people may refuse to take it, some may give up half-way through. It has given me the courage to go on.

By Adán Griego

Excerpted from Gleichmann, Gabi. An Interview With Bei Dao//
Modern Chinese Literature. – Vol. 9. – 1996. – P. 387-393.

After You Read

1. What poetry means to Bei Dao?
2. What opportunities did exile give to him? Is it a good experience?
3. In his interview Bei Dao said that every human being must "face the heart of darkness". What does he mean?
3. Find another interview at http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/journal/vol2no1/v2n1_Bei_Dao.html, and report to the class what you got to know about Bei Dao, the man and Bei Dao, the poet.

4. Why do you think Bei Dao is rated among the very best?

Bei Dao: Thirteen Poems

Before You Read

1. Bei Dao's hermetic style of poetry has been baffling his critics ever since he started writing in the late 1970s. Read a poem, taken from *Unlock*, and say whether one can make sense of it? What is the relationship between meaning and interpretative certitude?

Smells

Those smells making you remember again
like a horse-cart passing through the flea-market
curios, fakes, hawkers'
wisdom covered in dust

and there's always a gap between you and reality
arguing with the boss
you see the ad out the window
a bright tomorrow, Tomorrow brand toothpaste

you are facing five potatoes
the sixth is an onion
the outcome of this chess game is like sorrow
disappearing from the maritime chart

2. Now read the interpretation⁵¹ of this poem, and say whether your inferences coincide with these or not.

The *first stanza* introduces the general notion of "smells" and places the reader within the realm of an outdoor market. This market though seems to have withered, gone out of existence. All of the life of the market (seen in the curios, the fakes, the hawkers, indeed the most aggressive poseurs) is covered in dust. Like so much of Bei Dao's work, there is a sense of loss and dilapidated culture present. This barren marketplace underscores this sense.

Stanza two presents a speaker addressing a reader trying to convince that reader that he/she too is dislocated, distant from authority with whom it presumably does no good to argue and distant from reality (the ultimate authority?). Economic realities prevail outside the window in the form of the "ad." There is a sense that economic progress is being mass marketed. Its importance to one's daily life makes it as essential as toothpaste. This seems to speak to me of Mao's Great Leap Forward for China in the late 50's and early 60's. The speaker seems to dissent from such a mass marketing appeal.

⁵¹ Victor Schnickelfritz at http://whimfetishandblogorrhea.blogspot.com/2005_03_01_archive.html

The third stanza suggests that there is an odd man out, the onion that is in line with the five potatoes that precede it. Bei Dao implies that this onion is in a strategic battle with the potatoes (reminiscent of Bei Dao's struggles with the Chinese government during the days leading to the Tiananmen Square protest). The last two lines are very curious though. The outcome of this struggle is said to be similar to the disappearance of sorrow from a maritime chart. This is a striking image and more than a bit elusive; however, I contend that the unmappable human emotion suddenly becomes absent in the same way that the human spirit disappeared from the map after it was crushed during the uprising in Tiananmen Square.

3. Does Bei Dao resist reading? Why (not)?

Read one poem from Bei Dao's *Thirteen poems*, trying to read between the lines. What do you think each of its stanzas suggests?

Bei Dao Thirteen poems

June

Wind at the ear says June
June a blacklist I slipped
in time

note this way to say goodbye
the sighs within these words

note these annotations:
unending plastic flowers
on the dead left bank
the cement square extending
from writing to

now
I run from writing
as dawn is hammered out
a flag covers the sea

and loudspeakers loyal to the sea's
deep bass say June.

Post

An elk heading for the pit-trap
power, the fir tree said, struggle

cherishing the same secret
my hair turned white
retiring, going backwards
leaving my post

only one step back
no, ten whole years
my era behind me
suddenly beating on a bass drum.



Delivering Newspapers

Who believes in the mask's weeping?
who believes in the weeping nation?
the nation has lost its memory
memory goes as far as this morning

the newspaper boy sets out in the morning
all over town the sound of a desolate trumpet
is it your bad omen or mine?
vegetables with fragile nerves
peasants plant their hands in the ground
longing for the gold of a good harvest
politicians sprinkle pepper
on their own tongues
and a stand of birches in the midst of a debate:
whether to sacrifice themselves for art or doors

this public morning
created by a paperboy
revolution sweeps past the corner
he's fast asleep.

Teacher's Manual

Untitled

The landscape crossed out with a pen
reappears here

what I am pointing to is not rhetoric
October over the rhetoric
flight seen everywhere
the scout in the black uniform
gets up, takes hold of the world
and microfilms it into a scream

wealth turns into floodwaters
a flash of light expands
into frozen experience
and just as I seem to be a false
witness

sitting in the middle of a field
the snow troops remove their
disguises
and turn into language.

Morning Song

A school still in session
irritable restless but exercising restraint
I sleep beside it
my breath just reaching the next
lesson in the textbook: how to fly

when the arrogance of strangers
sends down March snow
a tree takes root in the sky
a pen to paper breaks the siege
the river declines the bridge invites

the moon takes the bait
turning the familiar corner
of the stairs, pollen and viruses
damage my lungs damage
an alarm clock
to be let out of school is a revolution
kids jump over the railings of light
and turn to the underground
other parents and I
watch the stars rise

Deformation

Words are the poison in a song
 on the track of the song's night road
 police sirens aftertaste
 the alcohol of sleepwalkers

waking up, a headache
 like the window's transparent
speakers
 from silence to a roar

learning to waste a life
 I hover in the birdcalls
 crying never

when the storms have filled up with
gas
 light rays snatch the letter
 unfold it and tear it up.

Spending the Night

A river brings a trout to the plate
 brother alcohol and father sorghum
 ask me to spend the night, the glass
 has the wrinkles of a murderer

the hotel clerk stares at me
 I hear his arrhythmic heart
 that heart now bright now dim
 lighting the registration form

on the glossy marble
 the piano goes out of tune
 the elevator turns a yawn into a
scream
 as it cuts through lamplit foam
 coming out of its sleeve
 the wind bares an iron fist.

My back to the window of open fields
 holding on to the gravity of life
 and the doubts of May
 like the audience at a violent movie
 lit by drink

except for the honey-drop at five o'clock
 the morning's lovers grow old
 and become a single body
 a compass needle
 on a homesick sea

between writing and the table
 a diagonal enemy line
 Friday in the billowing smoke
 someone climbs a ladder
 out of sight of the audience

The Hunt

The teacher faded long ago
 yet the fragments of her diary
 act as a go-between
 following the corridors of continual
evolution

the whole team chases the rabbit
 who will skin it?

the back door leads to summer
 the eraser can never erase
 the dotted lines turning into sunlight
 the rabbit's soul flies low
 looking for its next incarnation

this is a story, many years ago
 someone's ears pricked up

stole a glimpse of the sky
 and we the wolves suckling on a red
lamp
 have already grown up.

Mission

The priest gets lost in prayer
an air shaft
leads to another era:
escapes climb over the wall

panting words evoke
the author's heart trouble
breathe deep, deeper
grab the locust tree roots
that debate the north wind

summer has arrived
the treetop is an informer
murmurs are a reddish sleep
stung by a swarm of bees
no, a storm

readers one by one clamber onto the
shore

Dry Season

First it's the wind from home
the father like a bird flying
over a river of drowsy haze
suddenly changes course
but you're already sunk in the fog

supposing memory wakes
like the night sky in an observatory
you clip your fingernails
close the door open the door
friends are hard to recognize

until letters from the old days
completely lose their shadows
at sunset you listen closely
to a new city
built by a string quartet.

Swivel Chair

I walk out of a room
like a shadow from a music box
the rump of the sun sways
stopping dead at noon

empty empty swivel chair
in the funnel of writing
someone filters through the white paper:
wrinkled face
sinister words

in regard to enduring freedom
in regard to can I have a light

the heart, as if illuminating
even more of the blind
shuttles between day and night.

Soap

In the kitchen washing my hands
soapy water runs down the drain
like a French horn's
anxiety

the bride waves goodbye
to the canal of keeping dates
who is the white-haired witness
going upstream?

a group photo with the sun
half my face covered
the other half daylight
in the windless solitude

in the rivers and lakes fish forget one
another

the night creates a momentary god
bats in the eyes of drug addicts
destroy themselves in passion.

After You Read

1. Is Bei Dao's poetry dark? Does it champion the spirit of the individual? Does it provide insight into how to write political poems?
2. Do you agree that the act of reading Bei Dao is much like reading a mysterious rebus?
3. Do his images endeavor to lead the reader to a conclusion?
4. Did you find in Bei Dao's poems an exercise in survival, a battle of voices, and a strategy of mapping out the vanishing self against all antagonistic forces in contemporary societies, real or imagined?
5. Do you share this opinion concerning the "intimated meaning" of Bei Dao's works? Why (not)?

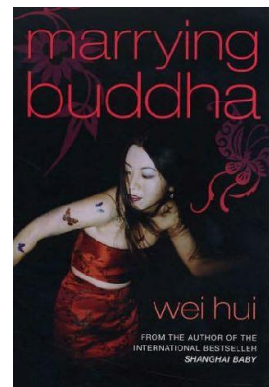
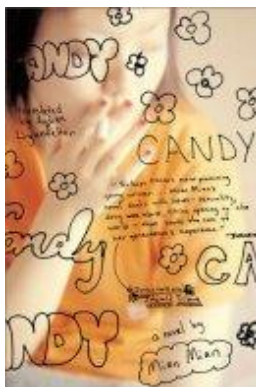
Admittedly, I don't always get to a place where I can absolutely say what the "intimated meaning" is in every piece. Quite frankly, I don't care after a while. I luxuriate in his imagery. I just let it take me where it wants to go. If it reveals, so much the better. Of course, in order to be led by the nose like this, one has to develop an addiction to imagery. This may not be possible for those who always wish the imagery to "add up" to something or those who get their jollies from a rhetorical flourish.

6. Do you now understand what Bei Dao meant when he said in his interview that every human being must "face the heart of darkness"?

Exploring Other Sources: Mian Mian and Wei Hui

In his interview Wolfgang Kubin mentioned the names of Mian Mian and Wei Hui, contemporary Chinese writers. Exploring various sources of information find and read the biographies or interviews with these writers, and say whether Wolfgang Kubin was right claiming that their works "...is not literature."

Mian Mian is famous for her novels *Candy* and *Panda Sex*. **Wei Hui**'s well-known novels are *Shanghai Baby* and *Marrying Buddha*. Read these novels or their summaries, and agree or disagree with Wolfgang Kubin's estimation of the "pretty girl writers' talent".



Unit 2

Japanese Literature



In this unit you will read:

- An Interview With Yoshimoto Banana
- Yoshimoto Banana *Amrita* (excerpt)

Banana Yoshimoto: Biography

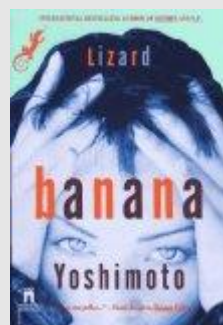
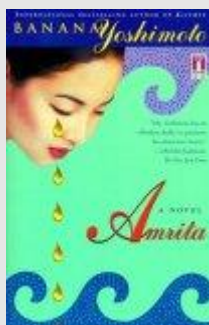
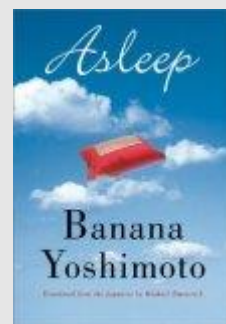
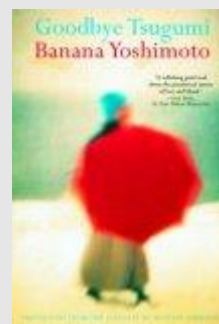
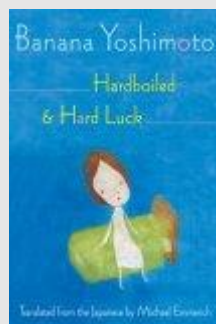
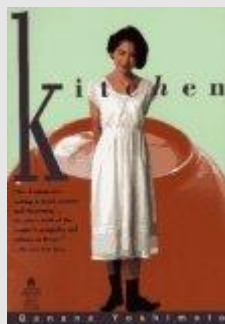
Banana Yoshimoto, née Yoshimoto Mahoko, was born on July 24, 1964 in Tokyo. Her father, Yoshimoto Takaaki, is an influential Japanese philosopher.

When she was 22, she graduated from the art department at Nihon University. The next year, she was given the "New Prize for Literature" for "Kitchen" and the "Izumi Kyoka Prize" for "Moonlight shadow."

She won many prizes for "Utakata" and "Tugumi" one after another. Recently, she was given the "Murasakishikibu Prize" for "Amrita".



Banana Yoshimoto



When the movie "Tugumi" was released, it became popular among the young people. In her novel, "Kitchen," she satisfied all her wants for food and sex by eating and sleeping in the kitchen, which was her most favorite place in this world.

The world of her books always surrounded by death, but their heroines tried to live and recover themselves from the bottom of their loneliness.

At the same time, there are not only the sadness of daily life but also some hopes in her books. For example, friendship, future dreams, fraternal love, and family love.

She wrote many provocative books about incest and lesbianism. Her books always introduce new things to our pool of common knowledge.

Available at: <http://www.cc.kyoto-su.ac.jp/information/famous/yoshimotob.html>

An Interview With Banana Yoshimoto

Before You Read

1. In the introduction to the interview you'll find these adjectives. Make sure you know their meanings. Use a dictionary if necessary.

- a quirky story (para 1)
- a gritty story (para 3)
- dogged innocence (para 3)
- offbeat son (para 1)

2. Explain the meanings of the following phrases. Use a dictionary if necessary.

- She remains somewhat of a mystery overseas (para 1)
- ...themes that have been beaten many times... (para 3)
- Her prose is wholly devoid of the privilege and pretense that sometimes surrounds her. (para 4)
- She takes pleasure in the small things... (para 4)

3. Translate into Ukrainian focusing on the phrases in italics.

Para 1:

- "*Bananamania*", as the press likes to call it, first **swept Japan** in 1988 when Yoshimoto's debut novella, *Kitchen*, first **came into print**.
- *Kitchen* – a quirky story about a transsexual mother, her offbeat son, and a young girl who loves kitchens – **has gone into more than 60 printings**.

Para 4:

- In spite of the fact that her father's work was the bible for Japan's radical youth movement in the '60s, and that she routinely **rubs elbows with the likes of** Pedro Almodovar and the Dalai Lama, Yoshimoto's prose is wholly devoid of the privilege and pretense that sometimes surrounds her.

Para 5:

- Were it not for this nation's **shockingly small appetite for foreign books**, Americans, too, would **succumb to Bananamania**.

4. In *Hardboiled and Hard Luck*, Yoshimoto Banana wrote, "You have to live a hardboiled life. No matter what happens, keep going around with your nose in the air." Do you think you've lived your life this way?

Read the interview with Yoshimoto Banana, and pay attention to the forms of the answers she gives. Are they evasive / sincere / laconic? What do they say about Yoshimoto Banana, the person?

An Interview With Yoshimoto Banana

- (1) "Bananamania, " as the press likes to call it, first swept Japan in 1988 when Yoshimoto's debut novella, *Kitchen*, first came into print. Since then Yoshimoto has written nearly a dozen books, and *Kitchen* – a quirky story about a transsexual mother, her offbeat son, and a young girl who loves kitchens – has gone into more than 60 printings. While online shrines are routinely constructed for Yoshimoto in Japan, she remains somewhat of a mystery overseas...
- (2) Perhaps what's most striking about Yoshimoto's work is her close proximity to the reader. She writes curious and inviting stories, the kind that make you pause and wonder about the author...
- (3) Yoshimoto's characters deal with youthful troubles and urban existentialism – two themes that have been beaten many times but never seem to die. Yet unlike Bret Easton Ellis, and all the other urban writers with their detached, bird's-eye perspectives, Yoshimoto writes gritty stories with warmth and dogged innocence.
- (4) In spite of the fact that her father's work was the bible for Japan's radical youth movement in the '60s, and that she routinely rubs elbows with the likes of Pedro Almodovar and the Dalai Lama, Yoshimoto's prose is wholly devoid of the privilege and pretense that sometimes surrounds her. She takes pleasure in the small things – be it the crack of a floorboard or the smell of *kimchee*.
- (5) Given the humane nature of Yoshimoto's work and the fact that she renamed herself Banana, it is not surprising that food is a recurring theme in many of her stories. Were it not for this nation's shockingly small appetite for foreign books, Americans, too, would succumb to Bananamania.
- (6) I wish I could say that I sat down with Yoshimoto and discussed love, loss and human frailty over shabu-shabu and sashimi, but in truth, this interview was conducted via e-mail with the help of a Japanese translator. Enjoy.



You clearly like to write about food. Is it appetite or the taste of food that interests you so much?

Oh, I am more interested in the taste of food, and in the feelings that people have when they are making a dish. I like to ask myself what tastes or environments will trigger a particular thought or memory.

It is said that the nicer the restaurant, the smaller the portions. Do you think the same could be said for modern prose?

Quality is always more important than quantity. This is true for everything. Even if you write only one line in your life, if it stays in someone's mind forever, it is satisfactory.

You approach difficult subjects, such as death, adultery and sexuality, in a decidedly casual and accessible manner. Do you ever write with a specific audience in mind?

I have in mind sensitive, somewhat adolescent people who are stuck between reality and fantasy. Young, rebellious people like to read my books, but I guess what I really like is to encourage adults who still have playful, adolescent minds.

Like the characters in your stories, you seem to have led a beautiful but crazy life; do you find a lot of yourself in the characters you write? Are there any characters that you particularly relate to?

Not really. My life is sober and simple these days, so no one in my stories resembles me. Mostly I write about people who live remote and distant lives.

In many of your stories, the characters experience strange dreams or are haunted by premonitions. Do you yourself have a rich dream world?

Yes, I do. I have many rich dreams. I go to sleep for dreams, they are the seeds of my work. When I do not know what to write, sometimes I find my next story in a dream. I should probably never wake up, that way I would have more stories to write.

Your settings are always quite stunning and vivid. Do you do any research or preparation before writing?

Rather than concrete research or preparation, I try to think in the abstract, such as the feeling of air in certain places, humidity, winds and so on.

You have traveled all over the world, and yet your stories are always set in Japan. Why is that?

Because I can only connect with other places as a traveler.

What was it like to be a teenager in Tokyo during the '80s? Have you ever imagined living elsewhere?

I do not have wonderful memories. Everybody in Tokyo seemed to be in a hurry at that time. I often had the thought that I should leave and study abroad.

We share a love for Truman Capote. He once wrote, “There are certain shades of limelight that really wreck a girl’s complexion.” Having lived in a large city for a good portion of your life, would you agree?

Yes, I would. For me though, large cities are really a part of who I am, so I’ve grown used to the unflattering aspects. I can swim in a large place without much difficulty.

Your prose is very rhythmic; do you ever listen to music while writing?

In fact, I do not listen to music while writing. I feel my own rhythm would go out of tune if I listened to music.

You dedicated *Lizard* to the late Kurt Cobain and you wrote about Sonic Youth in *Kitchen*. What is it about grunge rock that inspires you so? And what musicians are you listening to these days?

They were companions for me at that blind point in my life, when I was groping for something. Nowadays my favorite band is Britain’s Prefab Sprout. In the U.S., I love the *Eels*.

I heard that you are attending hula school. How did that come about?

While I was researching a short story, I gradually fell in love with the hula (dancing).

You don’t write a lot about motherhood, but clearly it is a big part of your life. How has it changed you? Has it affected your writing in a noticeable manner?

In essays I write about my son, but not as much in stories. The change for me is that I tend to think I want to live longer. Before, I was just in a hurry to live.

In *Hardboiled & Hard Luck*, you wrote, “You have to live a hardboiled life. No matter what happens, keep going around with your nose in the air.” Do you think you’ve lived your life this way?

No, not at all. I just live lazily and slowly. I just want to live as myself.

You are one of the most (if not *the* most) popular female novelist in Japan. What, if any, challenges have you faced as a popular female writer in Japan?

Everybody seems to be interested in the number of books I sold and how much money I earned, rather than the content of my work. This makes me rather unhappy.

You're somewhat of an enigma over here - have you spent much time in America?

Recently, I went to Naples. In the past I visited New York where I met Paul Auster. He was a spectacular person.

Are there any places, customs or words that particularly appeal to you?

I really liked Naples. There were alligators and the nature was so beautiful. Sanibel Island is one of my favorite places.

In America, writing professors who are trying to be hip will often assign a Banana Yoshimoto story, and as a result, you have become quite popular with young and aspiring writers. Do you have any advice for this miserable lot?

That is very, very delightful. I would say to them, "just write and write." Without any fancy theories or logic. Express yourself with your words, not others. This is all I can say....

Available at: http://www.bookslut.com/features/2005_08_006254.php

After You Read

1. Yoshimoto Banana has travelled all over the world. Is she a cosmopolitan person?
2. What period of her life does she call "blind point in my life"?
3. What are the subjects of her stories? Do you think they cover the interests of all readers?

Yoshimoto Banana "Amrita"

Before You Read

1. To better understand this rambling first-person chronicle of goings-on read the book review below:

Penned in 1994, when Banana Yoshimoto was thirty years old, *Amrita* centers on a girl named Sakumi. Sakumi is quite similar to the typical Yoshimoto protagonist: mid-twenties, pretty but not beautiful, and from an affluent albeit broken family. She spends her days doing what a number of young women from similar backgrounds do: She shops at expensive boutiques, hangs out with her friends, and has long, leisurely dates with her boyfriend. However, there is one key element to Sakumi that differentiates her: One day, she split her head open when she fell on some steep steps, causing her mind to become a clean slate.

Working at a small bar called Berries and living with her odd family – her mother, her cousin, her mother's best friend, and her little brother – Sakumi spends her days similarly to the way that she did before, but with the added addition of suddenly recalling memories that had been deeply submerged in her subconsciousness. Many of these memories concern her dead sister Mayu, a once a famous actress. Beautiful and liked by everyone, Mayu died years before in an accident related to alcohol and drug use. Her memory hangs over Sakumi's family and the mind of Mayu's boyfriend Ryuichiro, a writer who has become a globetrotter after Mayu's death. With this deep shadow over her life, Sakumi tries to rediscover herself.

Amrita is definitely a convoluted work due to the introductions and disappearances of characters – seemingly at random – and a confusing timeline which offers few clues as to whether the setting is in the past or the present. However, the book is not a rambling mess. With a clean slate for a mind, Sakumi definitely has an interesting outlook towards life. She sees her family members in a completely new light and learns slowly what makes each person important to her and how each person is a piece of the puzzle which is her memory.

Like almost every other Yoshimoto novel, *Amrita* is tinged with melancholy, and it can make the readers reflect on their own personal relationships, how their concepts of a person is completely made up of thoughts and memories, and how truly tenuous these thoughts and memories are.

By Michael Ward

Available at http://www.hipsterbookclub.com/reviews/copy/amrita_banana_yoshimoto.html

2. As you may have noticed the narrative you are going to read has a psychological theme. Read these quotes, and say how you feel when you start thinking about meaning of life.

...Only recently have I discovered that humanity, that large, solid body which seems so steadfast and strong, is actually nothing but a soft, flabby object, easily ruined under pressure – like when it's stabbed, or run into.

This thing we call humanity, soft and as fragile as an uncooked egg, manages to survive each day unscathed. Human beings function together and carry on separate lives, each and every one of us. All people – the people that I know, the people that I love – manage to go through life one day at a time, despite the fact that we do it holding weapons that could easily destroy us at any moment. Every day brings a new miracle....

Of course there will always be calamities in this world, and I wonder why they exist. I ask myself that every time someone I know passes away, or I see someone in pain. But then I can't help thinking about the other side of the story as well – the miracle of life that each of us witnesses every day. Compared to the wonder of daily life, perhaps there isn't a whole lot we can do about the sorrow...

While reading the excerpt from *Amrita*¹ underline the similes Sakumi uses to describe people and things. What characteristic of this or that object does the narrator emphasize with the aid of this stylistic device?

Amrita
Yoshimoto Banana

I've often heard that if you go through something really intense your perception of the world will change entirely. Every now and then I wonder if things weren't different in my case.

Now I understand. I'm finally at a point where I can recall everything: all twenty-eight years since my birth, every one of the so-called "episodes" of my life as Sakumi Wakabayashi, that strange conglomeration of misfits who came together to form my family, those foods that I liked, those things that I didn't. Every element that had gone into making me who I was gradually made its way back to me, and now I have the power to reflect on all that has happened. It's like remembering a story someone told me in the past.

I can only perceive my past as a story. Nothing more.

In other words, at some point I had lost the power to distinguish what was real, all of those things that had happened in life prior to the accident. I no longer had any way of knowing how I felt about myself and the world. Perhaps I'd felt the same way all along, perhaps not. I really wonder what things were like.

Was my life, all those days and months and years, nothing more than past time, piled up like fallen snow?

How was I ever able *come to terms with*² *myself*?

Apparently when you do something major like cutting off all your hair, your personality undergoes a transformation as well, because you change the way you act around other people.

...or at least that's what I've been told.

Before they performed my surgery, they shaved my head, and in an instant I was bald. By the time winter rolled around my hair had finally *grown in*³, and I was sporting a trendy, short cut.

When I revealed myself to my family and friends, they *barked out*⁴ unanimously, "Sakuchan! We've never seen you with short hair. You look so different, almost like a new person."

Really? I thought, returning their smiles. Later, all alone, I opened the pages of my photo album in secret. Without a doubt, it was me in the pictures – that long

¹ Amrita means water of god.

² *come to terms with sb* – дійти згоди

³ *to grow in (hair)* = *to grow in momentum* – відростати

⁴ *to bark out* – зненацька викрикнути

hair and radiant smile. All the places I'd visited, all the scenes I'd encountered. I recognized each one of them from somewhere. I remembered...

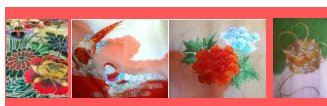
...the weather in this picture, and...

...I had my period when they took that shot, so it was a pain to even stand up, and...

...and so on.

There was no question about it; it really was me in that album. It couldn't have been anyone else. Still, something refused *to ring a bell*⁵. A strange sensation, almost as if I had been floating.

Now I want to stand up and give myself, steadfast and determined, a round of applause for maintaining "*me*," even though *I had been thrust into such a strange psychological dilemma*⁶.



There were quite a few of us at home back then: my mother, me, my little brother Yoshio, who had just entered the fourth grade, and my mother's old friend Junko, who was living with us for a while. My cousin Mikiko, a student at a nearby women's university, was also at home. My father had passed away many years before, and since then my mother had both remarried and divorced. That's why my brother's father was different from mine. Actually, there was another sister between me and Yoshio. Her name was Mayu. She was my younger sister, from my mother's first husband, so we shared the same father. Throughout her early life Mayu worked in the entertainment business, but that didn't last for very long. Eventually she got out of it and moved in with a friend who was a writer. In the end her heart was troubled, and she died – as if she had taken her own life. It all happened quite some time ago.

I used *to wait tables*⁷ five nights a week. Even though I was on the night shift, and we served drinks, there was nothing questionable about the place where I worked – it was just an old bar, the kind everyone's familiar with. My boss, the bartender, was a hippie, so the inside of the bar looked like some kind of campus festival, a decor you see a lot of nowadays. I also did odd jobs around a friend's office *every now and again*⁸, whenever I found time in the afternoon – secretarial work, mostly. I suppose I was into a lot of things back then.

My father was rich when he died. I *have a hunch*⁹ that at one point I thought a lot about the amount of money he left us, and about the best way to succeed in life while enjoying everything it has to offer. Chances are my feelings were

⁵ *to ring a bell* – дзвонити в дзвін = про щось нагадувати

⁶ *to be thrust into a psychological dilemma* – стояти перед ділемою

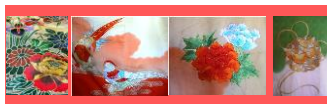
⁷ *to wait tables* – обслуговувати столи

⁸ *every now and again* – час від часу

⁹ *to have a hunch* – мати підозру

subconscious, but it seems I was preoccupied with those thoughts – always. Now as I look back, I see that I was no prima Donna, and I hadn't turned into a rebel, either. I had just *reached a strange juncture*¹⁰ in life. Nothing more.

Now I'm in love with all that's happened to me. I've really taken a fancy to it. It's enough to make me laugh aloud – I really have no excuse. *Simply put*¹¹, I've come to a point where this is how I perceive my existence, and if possible, I want everyone in the world to feel as wonderfully about it as I do.



I left the bar around three one night, and when I got home my mother was sitting at the kitchen table – bent over and frowning. I always found her in that spot, sitting in that position, whenever she had something to talk to me about. At least that's how it was back when she was about to get remarried. I remember that on the day my stepfather proposed she was sitting at the table in the same way. Even though she was thrilled to be engaged, she pretended to be sober, obviously an act. Ever since Junko had moved in my mother had used her as a sounding board, so it had been a while since I had talked to my mother like that in the kitchen.

Something told me that the topic of conversation that night would be my kid brother. He was acting kind of peculiar lately, which apparently had *caused a stir*¹² at his elementary school. Ever since Mayu died, the job of raising my brother seemed to fall endlessly on my mother's shoulders. Thinking about that makes me feel bad, because sometimes it seemed like my mother didn't care for the life she'd been given.

Even though we both lived in the same home, in that home where I floated through life without a care in the world, my mother seemed different. It hurt me to see her so troubled.

I asked her if anything was wrong.

The house was deadly quiet, the kitchen plunged in darkness. Only the small lamp hanging over the sink was lit, shimmering with an eerie, incandescent glow. Under that light my mother looked like a black-and-white photograph. I could see the dark shadows that lived inside the tight curves around her eyebrows and lips.

"Sit down here for a minute," she said.

"Okay," I replied. "But how about some coffee?"

Mother nodded and stood up. "Sounds good. I'll make it."

¹⁰ *to reach a strange juncture* – увійти у дивну фазу

¹¹ *simply put* – просто кажучи

¹² *to cause a stir* – викликати ажіотаж

I pulled a chair over and listened as it screeched against the floor. I plunked down in the chair, *landing with a thud*¹³. Since I was on my feet all night long, I tended to lose all my power the instant I finally sat down. Then the stiffness from my sore back muscles would release and spread over my entire body. I could feel it happening that night.

There's something familiar about warm coffee on a late night. I wonder what it could be. It always makes me think of my childhood, even though I never drank coffee as a child. Like the morning of the first fallen snow, or a night of a strong typhoon, there is something reminiscent about late-night coffee, every time it makes a visit.

Mother spoke up. "It's about your brother."

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"He says he wants to become a writer."

First I'd heard of such news. "Why would he want to do something like that?" I said. On the whole, my brother was just like other boys his age, a kid who'd like to become a businessman simply for the money, or because of how they're portrayed so fashionably in television dramas. But a writer?

My mother shook her head. "Well, according to Yoshio, God appeared to him in his dreams."

A small gasp of air left my lips. I smiled and said, "Yeah, apparently that's really popular nowadays." My mother was silent, so I continued speaking. "Perhaps you should just leave him alone; after all, he's still just a kid. He doesn't know what he's talking about."

"*But that's not the least of it*¹⁴. Everything about him has been strange lately," my mother replied.

"Whatever the problem is, it's probably best just to wait and see what happens, rather than *going off*¹⁵ and worrying about it so much."

"I suppose he'll *grow out of it*¹⁶,"

"Besides, what's wrong with him wanting to become a writer?"

"I'm not sure. I just...Oh, I don't know. It just gives me a bad feeling."

"Well," I said, "Yoshio's the first boy in this family and none of us really know what to do with him. We'll just have to wait and see."

"First Mayu died, and then you split your head open. Now this." My mother let out a sigh. "When will it end? I'm beginning to think that there'll never be a time

¹³ *to land with a thud* – бухнутися, шльопнутися

¹⁴ *But that's not the least of it* – Але це ще не все.

¹⁵ *to go off* – каратися, мучитися

¹⁶ *to grow out of it* – перерости, з віком відвикнути від думки

without problems. I mean, you should see Yoshio when he writes. I feel like I'm watching somebody possessed when he's scribbling on his manuscript paper."

"Weird," I said. Intuition told me that my mother was the perfect example of a lighthouse that shines so brightly that ships coming in from sea get lost on their way to shore, falling victim to unusual destinies. I figured her special charm sought to change the very energy that it took to keep it alive. She was already aware of that fact, and she was hurt by it. As such, I didn't want to *bring it up*¹⁷ that night.

"Think of it this way," I replied. "If something were to happen to the family, then we'd be just like Mishima's *A Beautiful Star*. Wouldn't that be great? It would be so much fun." I didn't realize it until later, but to a certain extent my predictions would wind up coming true. My mother laughed.

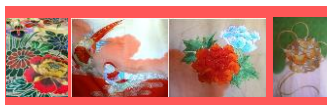
"*Tell you what*¹⁸," I said. "if it means anything, I'll sit down with the little squirt sometime tomorrow and interview him, see what he's really *up to*¹⁹."

"Oh, please do. Then you'll see why I'm so worried."

"Is he really acting that unusual?"

"Like a totally different person," my mother said, bobbing her head. When I told her I would talk to Yoshio, her face grew bright – brighter than it had been since the start of our conversation. I was relieved. I'd finally managed to bring her spirits up to a reasonable level.

When you're alone in a dark kitchen in the middle of the night, you're in a place where thoughts come to an eternal standstill. It's not possible to be there for a long time, and it's wrong. It's wrong for mothers, daughters, and wives to be imprisoned there forever. The kitchen is not only a place where we create wonderful borscht, but it's also a breeding ground for malice and kitchen drinkers. It's the region of the home that holds the power to preside over everything.



Only recently have I discovered that humanity, that large, solid body which seems so steadfast and strong, is actually nothing but a soft, flabby object, easily ruined under pressure – like when it's stabbed, or run into.

This thing we call humanity, soft and as fragile as an uncooked egg, manages to survive each day unscathed. Human beings function together and carry on separate lives, each and every one of us. All people – the people that I know, the people that I love – manage to go through life one day at a time, despite the fact

¹⁷ *to bring sth up* – починати розмову про щось

¹⁸ *Tell you what* – Ось, що я тобі скажу

¹⁹ *to be up to* – бути здатним на щось

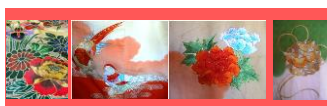
that we do it holding weapons that could easily destroy us at any moment. Every day brings a new miracle.

Once I start thinking like this I find it hard to get distracted.

Of course there will always be calamities in this world, and I wonder why they exist. I ask myself that every time someone I know passes away, or I see someone in pain. But then I can't help thinking about the other side of the story as well – the miracle of life that each of us witnesses every day. Compared to the wonder of daily life, perhaps there isn't a whole lot we can do about the sorrow...

...or so such thoughts cross my mind, and when that happens I feel like I'm the one who's come to a stop, right in the middle of living.

Be it the universe, be it the people I know. Be it their parents, and those loved by the people I know. Numberless births. Numberless deaths. Limitless numbers that would make you shudder if you could see them. Let me see the numbers now – those numbers close to infinity – as I think through my foggy perception of the world.



My friends refer to that day as "the day she took a fall on the stairs." It was early autumn, the twenty-third of September.

I was in a hurry to get to work. I thought it would be faster to take a shortcut – a route I rarely used. It meant climbing down a stairwell behind the street I normally took, a stairwell that was infamously steep. It's behind my old junior high school, and the broad stone steps were also notorious for getting dangerously slippery during winter. Everyone knew that the stairwell was closed when it snowed.

It must have been the combination of the navy blue twilight, a hue *fading away*²⁰ into the darkness of night, and the yellow half-moon hanging midway in the sky that took me away that day. I *lost my footing*²¹, came down, and *smashed my head against the stone*²².

The impact was so strong I lost consciousness. They had to carry me away to the hospital.

When I *came to*²³, I had no idea of what was happening around me. My mind pounded with a strange pain that seemed to drag my head along with it. I reached out to discover my head was covered in bandages, and then I saw

²⁰ *to fade away* – зникати

²¹ *to lose one's footing* – оступитися

²² *to smash one's head against the stone* – сильно вдаритися головою об камінь

²³ *to come to* – отямитися

myself back on the stairwell, and remembered all the pain and surprise that came along with it.

In front of me was a nice-looking, middle-aged woman. She opened her mouth and addressed me.

"Sakumi."

Since she appeared to be the right age, and since she was standing right there beside me in the hospital, I had the notion that she was, maybe, my mother. At least that's what went through my mind. It was the only reason I could give for her being there. Something about her was oddly familiar, but I couldn't say who she was, or what she was like. The information just wasn't there. She had to be my mother, or someone like her, because she was there with me in my room that day.

Did she look like me? Then it hit me – I couldn't remember my own face.

One thing was certain. If this woman was there, taking care of me like that, it would have been wrong to say something that might offend her. As I lay there troubled, wondering what to say or do, *a small flashback trickled into my mind*²⁴, This woman was at home (But where was home? Which sky was it under? What kind of place was it?), and she was crying. The memory of her tears came back to me, bubbling up from the crystal-clear surface of my pool of memories, as if it were a flashback in a movie, a scene that had been filmed with a filter over the camera lens. My grandfather had died, yes, I was sure of it. You know, tears really do flow one right after another, each grazing your cheek and hitting the ground...

...or so the memories came back to me.

Then I saw my sister.

I couldn't remember her name, but the likeness of a gorgeous young woman came floating up along with the impression that I had had a sister. The image of her face was so strong that at first I thought she was something I had created in my mind. Then I felt sure it was Mayu, and I watched her from behind as she organized a pile of things that she'd left behind.

A while ago, back when I was living on my own, I went through *a rocky break-up with a boyfriend*²⁵. Talking to my mother over the phone, tears began to fall from my eyes. My mother stopped in the middle of her sentence and said, "My goodness, Sakumi. You're crying."

I surprised her because I rarely cried, even as a child.

²⁴ *a small flashback trickled into my mind* – короткий ретроспективний епізод тоненьким струмочком пройшов скрізь пам'ять

²⁵ *a rocky break-up with sb* – важкий розрив відносин

Oh, this person standing next to me really was my mother. There was no mistake about it. I couldn't hurt her. The impression echoed over and over in my mind like the chant of a Buddhist shingon.

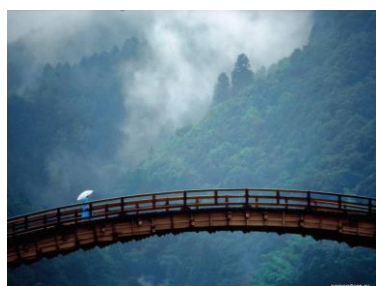
She must have thought that I was still under the anaesthesia. I had large, black circles under both of my eyes. But when she saw that I had come to and was glancing up at her through my *blurred vision*²⁶, she began to rejoice.

Eventually everything cleared. I realized that by perceiving myself in one way I would manage to go on living, but if I thought about things another way I would only *wear myself down*²⁷. In a matter of seconds I'd been introduced to "Sakumi," and before long I'd received a crash course on her life until then. Of course my real knowledge was limited to what came to me on a day-to-day basis, and from there on out I was forced *to live a haphazard life*²⁸, a balancing act, *so to speak*²⁹. But what else could I do? I was only certain of so much.

"Mother?"

The word just slipped from my mouth. She nodded her head slowly. It was a nod from the heart, full of hope and excitement. I burst out laughing like a new bride. There I was, a newborn in this world, having just uttered my first word, a warm and pleasant word at that. Yet there was something bleak and dreary about me, as if I were nothing more than a little hooligan pretending to be a new bride. My head pounded, and brought with it a pain so intense that the concept of "mother" seemed to drill itself straight into the part of my brain that had become a thick, very thick, piece of compressed flesh. The sound of that word had simultaneously caused a lump to form somewhere near my heart. What could it have been?

Moving my eyes, I saw that it was the middle of the day in my hospital room, and the bright, shining sky streamed into my room from the outside window. The light reminded me of my own consciousness – bright, blue, and completely empty.



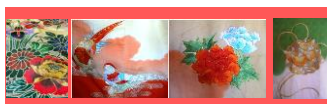
My memory would eventually come back to me, but most of it happened gradually, like the words of a letter written in invisible ink slowly seeping through the lemon juice. Still, the glass wall that came between me and myself, something that should have been clear and lucid, was cloudy and unclear. It was like a waterproof wristwatch that somehow manages to trap a drop of moisture within its mechanism, fogging up the outer glass. Regardless of how hard you shake it, the water doesn't go away. But that's okay. It didn't matter anymore.

²⁶ *blurred vision* – неясний, розпливчастий погляд

²⁷ *to wear oneself down* – 1) стомлювати когось; 2) переборювати когось

²⁸ *to live a haphazard life* – проживати випадкове життя

²⁹ *so to speak* – так бо мовити



When I got home from work the next afternoon, I knocked cheerfully on my brother's door. I've often thought that when something this interesting happens at home, the only way to approach it is directly. Hence, the interview.

"Come in." It was Yoshio's voice.

Opening the door and entering the room, I saw my brother sitting at his desk, his shoulders bent over. Looking closer, I could see that he was fervently scribbling tiny characters all over a piece of B₅-size manuscript paper.

"I hear you're becoming a writer?" I asked.

"Yeah." My brother nodded, obviously not too concerned with the conversation.

"Do you want to write mysteries like Jiro Akagawa?" I said, recalling that only a few months earlier Yoshio had really been into a number of his books.

"No," my brother said, shaking his head. "Classics like Akutagawa." I could see the seriousness in his eyes. Without warning I felt tired, as if I had had the wind knocked out of me. There was an aura around my brother that hadn't been there before, just like there was something new about me. It pierced straight through my heart.

"What about Mayu's old boyfriend, Ryu-chan? He's considered to be more than a pop writer, you know." I was referring, of course, to the man my sister had lived with when she died, Ryuichiro. He was a writer of cult fiction, the only writer I knew.

"Yeah, I respect him a lot," Yoshio said. "He's a good writer."

Ryuichiro.

I recalled how difficult his book had been, so vague and abstract.

"You mean you read his book and understood it?" I asked.

"No, not really," Yoshio replied. "But when I look at the pages, they give me a good feeling. I suppose I could say the whole book has a nice fragrance about it."

"Hmm..." I'd never thought about books that way before. All I knew was his book, in particular, was dark fiction, so dark that I wasn't sure if I would ever know what he was trying *to get at*³⁰.

My brother continued, "When I read it I remembered Mayu."

Now it was clear, and I nodded my head in reply. Her face was the beauty of perfect independence, a galaxy of possibilities. It delicately encompassed everything, all on its own. That's why I was having such an absurdly painful

³⁰ *to get at* – 1) відкрити, зрозуміти, виявити; 2) досягти

time recalling it. It was natural and straightforward, something like a flower, so moist and sweet it released a soft perfume, just like Yoshio had said.

I love her face – the image of my sister.

Even now I see her in my dreams, smiling.

"Well then, write a good book and let your big sister read it," I said.

"Will do," Yoshio replied. For some reason when I looked at him he seemed more like an adult than a child.

"But I..." I stopped for a moment. "I really want you to turn out okay, Yoshio. Even if you become a writer, that still doesn't make you better than the other boys your age. I want you to grow up to be the kind of guy who makes girls go crazy. You know, a good-looking guy who can write well, too. That would be so much better than turning out like those boys with bad manners."

"Gotcha. I'll watch out."

"So tell me," I said. "Why the change? I mean, all of a sudden here you are, acting like an adult, all smart and clever, and you're writing. *What's gotten into you?*³¹ Come on, you can tell me. I promise to keep it a secret from Mom." I grinned as I spoke.

Seriousness returned to his eyes and he said, "Something happened to me – up here." He pointed to his forehead.

"What?"

"They came in a dream, a bunch of gods, saying all sorts of weird things. That's when it happened – I got all changed inside. Now my mind won't stop working. I just think about things, you know, like how strange people are. We eat, poop, and pee, and our hair grows long. There's no way of stopping it. Even though we're only who we are, right this very second, we still bring up the past and worry about the future. It's so weird! And when I think about those things, I figure the only way I'm going to explain how I feel is by writing my thoughts down. Something tells me that if I make up stories about different people in different places, I'll finally get a grip on what I have to say."

I had to be impressed by a discourse like that. "Okay," I said, "I understand, and you have my full support. But I want you to remember something – something that I've dreamed about for a long time: One day when you're in high school, once you've grown big and tall, I see the two of us going downtown to buy a present for your girlfriend. We'll pick out something fancy, and I'll *pitch in some money*³² to help you buy it. Then we'll have tea at a nice, chic cafe in one of the department stores where cool grown-ups shop downtown. I know I might be asking a lot, but ever since you were born I've been thinking about how

³¹ *What's gotten into you?* – Що на тебе найшло?

³² *to pitch in some money* – зробити свій внесок

wonderful a date like that will be – ever since that cold day you blew into our house with the fallen snow."

"I'll remember," my brother said.

Relieved, I sat down and picked up a book that was lying next to me on the floor. I glanced at the title: *100 Real-Life Mysteries*.

"What's this?" I asked, holding up the book.

"Oh!" my brother said with excitement. "That's really interesting." His face seemed to finally reflect the child that was in him.

"Huh..." I said, *flipping through*³³ the loose pages. I stopped at one spot and began reading:

A WOMAN WITH TWO MEMORIES Ever since a freak automobile accident, Mary Hector of Texas has had recollections of a life quite different from her own. This forty-two-year-old housewife lived a tranquil life with her husband, a high school teacher, and their two boys until the day she was hit by an approaching vehicle on the way to pick up her husband from work. The other driver had fallen asleep at the wheel. Although Mary sustained several serious wounds, reports indicate that there was

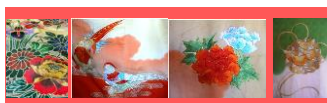
no injury to the brain. Two months after being released from the hospital, she realized that she had a complete set of separate memories, far from what she remembered about her own life as Mary Hector. The second memory came from a young girl who had died of pneumonia at age seventeen in Columbus, Ohio. Her name was Mary Sontag. Since Mary Hector could remember everything from Mary Sontag's mother's name to the name of the high school she had attended, she consulted with her husband

over the issue. After doing some research to confirm the validity of Mary's vivid "second recollection," evidence was found that proved a Mary Sontag had existed in Columbus, Ohio. Studies have shown that people with two memories, although extremely rare, do exist. However, Mary's situation remains an exception. The resemblance between the two women might stop at their first names, but that does not explain this extraordinarily unique phenomenon.

"Wow, pretty interesting," I said.

"Don't you think so?" Yoshio replied, sounding like an expert.

Closing the book, I stood up and said good-bye, and headed for my room. I figured it would be okay to leave my little brother alone, since there didn't appear to be anything wrong. It was winter, and the corridor between our rooms was chilly. Every inch of the hallway seemed *saturated with the scent of*³⁴ night. The glass window that ran the length of the hallway was pitch black, and I gazed into it, hoping that along with my face it would reflect all I had lost in memory.



That night I had a peculiar dream.

³³ *to flip through* – швидко переглянути

³⁴ *saturated with the scent of* – просочена ароматом

I dreamed that I was sitting on a bench, staring across a vast landscape spread out endlessly before me. The sky was frighteningly blue, a blue so thick it looked like a *Jell-O*³⁵ mold. I felt like I would be sucked into it at any moment. The color burst up from the horizon, rising endlessly into the heavens, in a gradation clear enough to touch. Nothing could prevent the sky from rising. There was just the dry air, parched earth, and a few buildings popping up here and there, forming a border along the horizon.



I'd never seen this place before, not once in my entire lifetime. It was overwhelming. As I sat on the oak bench examining my surroundings, a dusty wind came up and blew my hair. I glanced over and realized I was not alone. A woman was sitting next to me on the bench. In my dream I recognized her immediately.

Could I be in Texas?

No, it could have been anywhere. Then again, it must have been nowhere. It was a place where heaven and earth come together, a place where one dream unites with another, a place where the sweet, dry wind blows on forever.

I began to speak. "Mary, please share with me your thoughts on memory. Mine has been giving me a lot of trouble lately."

Her eyes were blue, a color that looked like it would melt into the sky. I was *despondent*³⁶, surrounded by too much of the same color. Was it because the color melted two people's lives into one? The sea of our memories, the echoes of the past – that color seemed to have it all.

She glanced up and said in a low voice, "The me that's only me is the only me that I can't remember." She smiled. "Sounds like a child's word game."

I looked at the deeply cut wrinkles in the corners of her eyes.

She continued, "I'm in the kitchen getting dinner ready, or looking at the sunset – that's when it happens. I *feel remorse*³⁷ during those everyday moments, when I'm not doing anything in particular. It's like there's a devil in my heart trying to make me feel bad about what happened, you know? Whenever that feeling comes over me, I think to myself that maybe that's something from the other Mary. In other words, it's gone that far – her memories have melted into my own. Of course, a part of me thinks that my own life is just as important as hers – but *don't get me wrong*³⁸: I don't hate her, even though she did get inside me by some bizarre *twist of fate*³⁹."

"But is it possible," I interrupted, "to know if you ever existed without her?" I looked off into the distance, realizing how desperate I had been for someone to

³⁵ *Jell-O* – trademark; used for a gelatin dessert usually with the flavor and color of fruit

³⁶ *to be despondent* – пригнічений, зневірений

³⁷ *to feel remorse* – каятися

³⁸ *Don't get me wrong* – Не зрозумійте мене неправильно

³⁹ *twist of fate* – поворот долі; хитрування долі

talk to. "I know that concerning myself with things like that I'll never make it out on my own, but every so often I just lash out in pain. It hurts, really hurts. I try looking at the stars, or my brother, and everything looks familiar, but at the same time something keeps telling me I'm seeing things differently than before. I feel like I've died and come back to life."

Mary lowered her head, and stayed silent for a while. Finally she glanced over to me with a faint smile. At that point I realized Mary had a much stronger recollection of death than I did, because even though she was sitting with me on the bench, somewhere inside all of her memory she really had passed away. How could she put up with such a thing? It was so frightening. She and I were there without permission, in a world with a landscape too vast for our eyes, not to mention that she'd have to go through the pain of dying all over again.

"Yes, I suppose things like that do happen," Mary said. "And when it happened to me I think I took it much harder than you. But now I see that inside of me there are two spirits viewing the world from my eyes. What could be wrong with that?" She looked away happily.



A drop of water fell from the sky.

"Oh, look," I said. "Rain. Even on a beautiful day like this."

The drop of rain had fallen through the bright rays of the sun from a single white cloud floating against the blue sky. At first I took it for a small fragment of ice, then more raindrops came down, one right after another, landing in our hair – mine black and hers golden yellow. Like something delightful, the rain fell through the warm air, casting a cold shadow around us. The rain was quiet, throwing light across the beautiful scenery like tiny little globes, giving us quick glances of the brilliant sun. Everything looked sweet glittering in the light. Now the world was wet around us, and even though I thought the moisture on my cheeks had fallen from my eyes, when I wiped away the tears I discovered that it was only water from heaven.

"So it's just the four of us now," I said, "the two of you and the two of me, all looking at the sky and the earth and the rain, which fell from a single white cloud."

Mary nodded silently.

I woke up, and for a brief moment longed for the landscape and rain that had shimmered in that sky. It had been a spectacular dream. I don't know why, but it was something to be thankful for.

Yes, I really think so.

After You Read

1. As you may have noticed the story consists of **flashbacks**⁴⁰ which enable readers to receive more details about the current narration by filling in the details about the past. At the beginning of flashbacks 1 you read:

"...if you go through something really intense your perception of the world will change entirely...."

From flashback 5 you get to know what happened to Sakumi. Do you agree with the statement taken from flashback 1? How did Sakumi perceive the world after she awakened with her memory in tatters?

2. In flashback 1 (para 7) you read:

"Apparently when you do something major like cutting off all your hair, your personality undergoes a transformation as well, because you change the way you act around other people."

Do you share this opinion? Did Sakumi's life change abruptly after she had had her hair cut?

3. Where did Sakumi work? What was that place like?

4. As you may remember Sakumi had an irregular family. What was unusual about her family?

5. As you may also remember Sakumi and her mother always discussed their problems in the kitchen. Do you agree that kitchen serves for such purposes as follow:

"When you're alone in a dark kitchen in the middle of the night, you're in a place where thoughts come to an eternal standstill. It's not possible to be there for a long time, and it's wrong. It's wrong for mothers, daughters, and wives to be imprisoned there forever. The kitchen is not only a place where we create wonderful borscht, but it's also a breeding ground for malice and kitchen drinkers. It's the region of the home that holds the power to preside over everything."

6. How did Sakumi feel about her mother's worries?

7. What was wrong with Yoshio, wanting to become a writer?

8. Did Sakumi find anything strange about Yoshio?

9. Did Yoshio want to become a writer like Ryuichiro? Did he like Ryuichiro's book? What was Yoshio interested in?

10. What dream did Sakumi have? What does it mean?

11. Revise the modal verbs with perfect infinitive:

a. Consider the use of the modal verbs: **must**, **could**, **should** and perfect infinitive.

⁴⁰ **Flashback** – an interruption of the chronological sequence of an event of earlier occurrence.

MUST + have + past participle of the verb conjugated = certainty referring to the past

e.g. I found her sitting at the kitchen table – bent over and frowning. She **must have had** something to talk to me about.

- It **must have been** the combination of the navy blue twilight,
- She **must have thought** that I was still under the anaesthesia.
- Then again, it **must have been** nowhere.

COULD + have + past participle of the verb conjugated = probability referring to the past

e.g. I don't remember anything. I **could have seen** Ryuichiro before the accident.

COULD + NOT + have + past participle of the verb conjugated = impossibility referring to the past

e.g. I'm sure it was Yoshio. It **couldn't have been** anyone else.

- No, it **could have been** anywhere.
- What **could** it *have been*?

SHOULD + have + past participle of the verb conjugated = obligation that had to be fulfilled in the past, but wasn't

e.g. You **should have read** Ryuichiro's book.

- Still, the glass wall that came between me and myself, something that **should have been** clear and lucid, was cloudy and unclear.

b. Comment on the following facts using the modals **must** or **could**, depending on your degree of certainty.

- When Sakumi revealed herself to her family and friends, they barked out unanimously, "Sakuchan! We've never seen you with short hair. You look so different, almost like a new person." Later, all alone, she opened the pages of my photo album in secret. Why did she open it in secret?
- When Sakumi told her mother that she would talk to Yoshio, her face grew bright. Why did her mother feel better?
- After Sakumi had found the story about a woman with two memories pretty interesting, Yoshio sounded like an expert. Why do you think his face didn't reflect the child that was in him?
- In Sakumi's dream, Mary glanced up and said in a low voice, "The me that's only me is the only me that I can't remember." What did she mean?
- Sakumi woke up, and for a brief moment longed for the landscape and rain that had shimmered in that sky. It had been a spectacular dream. She didn't know why, but it had been something to be thankful for. Yes, she really thought so. What was it to be thankful for?

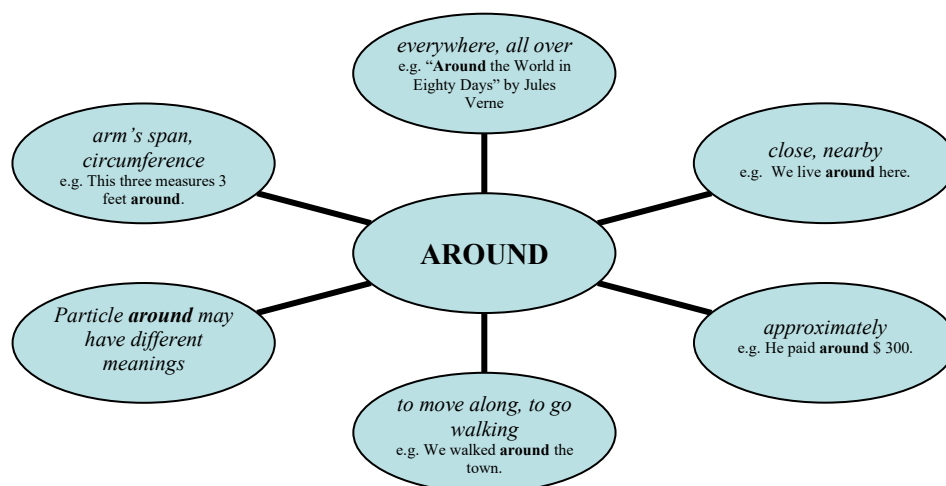
12. Fill in the chart, using the information from the text as well as your own experiences.

Heroes	Their individual qualities
Sakumi	<i>enchantingly muddled, sincere, full of love for her non-traditional family,</i>
Mother	<i>enigmatic person,</i>
Yoshio	<i>a strange kid, hearing voices and seeing visions,</i>

13. Did you like the story? Write about it in your journal.

14. Develop your way with words:

a. *Around* is one of the most common words in the English language. It has a number of various meanings. Here are some of the uses.



b. Replace the phrases in bold with phrases with *around*.

- There were flowers **everywhere** in the apartment, making it look more homely.
- Most guests started to make their way home **approximately** at 11 PM.
- Michael Palin **circumnavigated the world** to break Fogg's record.
- There is no one **here** that I know.
- Don't leave your papers **everywhere** – anyone can read them.
- It will be difficult **to solve** this problem.

c. Using your dictionary, find other uses of *around*. Complete the diagram above.

d. Using the context sentences and/or your dictionary, write the meanings of the phrasal verbs given below. Write a sentence with each of the phrasal verbs.

Phrasal Verb	Meaning
to roll around	
to fade away to pass away	
to sit down to plunk down to wear sb down	
to grow in to move in	
to go into to be into sth to get into sb	
to go off to look off	

Phrasal Verb	Meaning
to pull sth over to bend over	
to bark out to go out of sth to grow out of sth to turn out to reach out to do sth	
to go through sth	
to come to	
to pile sth up to bring sth up to wind up sb is up to sth to look up	

Exploring Other Sources: Yukio Mishima

In her talk with mother, Sakumi mentioned the name of a famous Japanese novelist, poet, playwright and essayist Yukio Mishima (1925-1970) and his avant-garde work *A Beautiful Star*. Exploring this source of information

<http://sensitivitytothings.com/2007/03/07/yukio-mishima/>

as well as the others, find and read the biography of Yukio Mishima. Write a report.

Unit 3

Korean Literature



The national flower of Korea is the mugunghwa, rose of sharon.

In this unit you will read:

- Stephen Epstein on Contemporary North Korean Fiction (essay)
- Han Ung-bin *Second Encounter*
- Kim Seong-kon *A Farewell to Bad Habits*
- Yang Kwi-Ja *A Distant and Beautiful Place*
- Cho Pyong Kwon *Great General Mighty Wing* (the Korean manhwa, excerpt)

On North Korean Fiction

Before You Read

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1. Find out whether you know the meanings of the words and phrases used in the essay. Use a dictionary if necessary.

a. Find 3-4 synonyms to the following words.

e.g. **crucial** – *critical, decisive, central, vital, essential, urgent*

**to contemplate, collapse, to highlight,
notorious, to be inoculated**

b. Write a short explanation for each of the phrases. Use each of these phrases in a sentence.

e.g. **a crucial query** - *an important issue that needs to be settled, discussed, or dealt with.*
This brings us to the crucial query of government funding.

- indigenous system for dates
- devastating food shortages
- personality cult
- the most salient feature
- the story that is related in flashback
- to preclude a detailed analysis
- a cross-cultural encounter
- an inordinately high death rate
- on the cusp of the new millennium
- to view something through rose-coloured glasses

c. Define the types of the multi-word verbs and explain their meanings.

e.g. **pay for** – a prepositional verb, i.e. a verb, which requires an object (a pronoun object can't be placed between the verb and the preposition);
pay for – to suffer or be punished for something you have done: These people should pay for their crimes.

**to fret about the vaccination, to trail off,
to seal off ambiguities**

d. Explain the use of the following clause in terms of grammar:

“for not only does the nation’s very self-conception rest on its relationship to its twentieth-century past”.

While reading the following essay, note the essential points outlining the North Korean literature and factors influencing its functioning in the modern world.

Encountering North Korean Fiction: The Origins of the Future

The new year is dawning. The thought that we are entering the last year of the current century arouses a different feeling within me than usual. My heart is overwhelmed with emotion and my thoughts come ever more frequently. Not many years ago the twenty-first century seemed as remote as the ends of space . . . but now we have reached its cusp.

Ri Chun-gil

Despite having its own indigenous system for dates based on the birth of Kim Il Sung, as North Korea approached the new millennium of the common era, the nation, like many throughout the world, contemplated where it had been and where it was headed. Such reflection occurred perhaps even more earnestly in the DPRK than elsewhere, for not only does the nation's very self-conception rest on its relationship to its twentieth-century past, but the year 1999 also culminated a decade of ongoing crisis: the collapse of communism in Europe, economic difficulties resulting from the loss of the nation's erstwhile trading partners, the death of Kim Il Sung, natural disasters, and, not least, devastating food shortages all contributed to a collective national sense of undergoing a "forced march" (*kanghaenggun*). In this essay I wish to highlight the articulation of fiction and its intersection with social concerns as North Korea entered the new millennium. Although the nation's writers remain as firmly committed as ever to the maintenance of the *Juche* ideology and a belief in the value of literature as a tool for propaganda, repeated references in recent stories to the "forced march" or "arduous march" (*konan ûi haenggun*) and their attendant issues offer evidence of an increasing psychological toll that has been exacted upon the DPRK.¹ Despite official pronouncements portraying the nation's journey on the forced march as a heroic effort that has been brought to a successful close, underscored by the use of the military metaphor, details in short stories, as we shall see, suggest much of the population may feel otherwise.

Analysis of North Korean literature almost invariably begins with discussion of its relationship to official policy, for as much as anywhere in the world artistic production is steeped in and skewed by heavy-handed directives from above. The regime enthusiastically proclaims that its art serves not entertainment but ideology, and that authors, in a notorious phrase borrowed by Kim Il Sung from 1930s Soviet Russia, are to be "engineers of the human soul."² Scholarship on North Korean literature in the West is rare and its particular focus on relationships with the development of *Juche* ideology and the Kim personality cult has at times precluded detailed analysis of individual texts.³ Even the more frequent book-length studies emanating from South Korea that treat works in depth tend to use them primarily as a vehicle for understanding DPRK society rather than examining closely how they function as literature per se.⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly, a generally low assessment of the quality of the DPRK's literature has also contributed to the paucity of close analysis: Kwon Young-min, for example, complains that the official guidelines set down by the *Juche* theory of art and literature have eliminated individual creativity.⁵

I would prefer to argue, however, that an alternative methodological perspective from which to approach the fiction of the DPRK is in terms of an implicit contract established between state, author, and reader. With editorials that appear in *Chosŏn munhak*, the DPRK's most important literary journal, under such hortatory titles as "Let's Be Active in Creating Literary Works That Positively Contribute to the Construction of a Strong Socialist State,"⁶ official policy could hardly be more explicit about what it desires from its literature, and North Korean readers will of course approach texts with such pronouncements in mind; simultaneously, though, they will possess less consciously formed expectations for a story in relation to its plot structure, narrative strategies, style, and the like, and the success of any given story will depend on the skill with which the author can manipulate these conventions within a rigid structure. In other words, while all concur that North Korean literature functions as a tool of state ideology, we still need to examine whether the nation's writers can wield this tool with sufficient subtlety that it functions not as a blacksmith's hammer, but a sculptor's chisel. It is not, for example, inevitable that characterization in North Korean literature be rough-hewn: although it often is, some writers portray their characters with a sympathy and insight that brings them to life even for a reader outside the ideological framework of *Juche*.

Given the revelation of social fissures in North Korean literature, its reception by its audience merits continual consideration; if we focus solely on how the regime wishes its fiction to be interpreted, we run the risk of taking its profession of monolithic solidarity at face value, precisely as its fiction warns us against doing so. As Kim notes, although many North Korean fictional texts indicate general "objectively" definable problems within society, the solutions depicted are in fact both abstract and "subjective," being dependent on individual characterization.⁷ One can press Kim's point further: it is in fact precisely the idiosyncratic moments of epiphany concluding many DPRK short

stories that reveal all the more clearly deep-rooted structural problems in contemporary North Korean society; the constant repetition of themes suggests an ultimate lack of confidence in solutions that substitute emotional catharsis for verifiable proof.

In the larger essay from which this summary comes, I focus on two questions: what literary mechanisms do recent stories use to wean readers from social reality to social ideals, and what issues acquire resonance in the unspoken contract between author, state, and reader on the eve of the new millennium?

Han Ung-bin's "Tubôntche sangbong" (Second Encounter)⁸ intrigues for two reasons: first, it depicts a cross-cultural encounter between citizens of Pyongyang and a Western journalist, and, second, it draws a surprisingly honest contrast between the optimism of the late 1980s and circumstances ten years later, revealing strains that occur within the narrator's own family that leave the ending unusually ambiguous. Kim Chae-yong notes that North Korean literature begins to move away from a one-sided tendency to view its world through rose-colored glasses during the 1990s, and this trend, which gathers steam during the decade, is much in evidence here.⁹ The bulk of "Tubôntche sangbong" is taken up with the first-person narrator's description of serving as a minder during the 1989 World Youth Conference to a Western journalist who doggedly refuses to believe the portrait of North Korean society with which he is presented.¹⁰ And while this encounter is fascinating in itself, that is not my focus here, for the text derives its effect from the relationship of the framing sections that depict the narrator's life and his perspective a decade later to the main portion of the story that is related in flashback.

The tale begins with the narrator looking out the window of his Pyongyang apartment and noting slogans everywhere on the streets ("Let's continue the arduous march vigorously onward to paradise!") that give expression to the hardships of the previous ten years. When we return to the present after the lengthy account of his experience as guide to the journalist, the narrator provides a detailed account of what the 1990s have meant for the DPRK. The narrator's thoughts are then interrupted by a knock on the door from the head of his *inminban* (people's group), who urges the family to go to the clinic to be inoculated. At this point the text provides a telling glimpse of domestic life, as the narrator's daughter, fretting about the vaccination, is scolded by her mother for not changing out of her school uniform. The narrator reflects on their bickering and the outside gloom, then trails off, "Nevertheless . . ." – an ellipsis that well accentuates the pervasive tension in recent short stories between the grim situation faced by contemporary North Korea and a steadfast refusal to lose faith in the ideals of *Juche*. Yet the daily conflict between mother and daughter which provokes tears suggests a society under severe stress and perhaps close to the breaking point; the mood here differs radically from earlier stories where one senses that the claim to live in a socialist paradise carried greater conviction for its audience.

The story concludes as the narrator explains why he has engaged in such a lengthy reminiscence. He has just re-encountered the journalist indirectly via one of his newspaper articles and then proceeds to quote from it; although the correspondent had believed that people the world over lived without hope for the future, he has discovered upon a return visit to North Korea that, in fact, there is one nation where faith remains strong: "ten years have passed, and, having traveled through several nations in Eastern Europe, I have come to realize as I walk through the roads of this land that, although few decorations are illuminated and the street lights are dim today, this indeed is a nation that knows neither desperation (*chôlmang*) nor anxiety (*puran*), a land filled with confidence in the future . . ."

The story thus appears to provide a more "objective" reason for optimism through the words of a foreign journalist, whose argument rests on personal observation and comparison. Nonetheless, the text follows a dangerous strategy in emphasizing present difficulties and contrasting them with the happier days of the late 1980s, because even within the narrator's household, one would be hard pressed to say that hope predominates over despair. The reader is asked ultimately to share the narrator's subjective faith; despite being reminded at length of contemporary hardships. More troublingly, the narrator's brief domestic vignette appears to belie the journalist's words, and the text allows the reader to wonder whether the narrator's wife and especially his daughter would second his interpretation. Reprimanded by her mother for not considering the nation's situation in wearing out her school uniform, the daughter greets the news of the vaccinations precisely with worry (*kôkchôngsûre*): a child's nervousness about needles or more serious concerns about health issues in a nation with an inordinately high death rate?¹¹ The text attempts to prescribe how it is to be read, but is unable to seal off ambiguities, as the narrator's satisfaction that the DPRK's way of life continues defuses discontent largely by raising fears over alternatives.

What, in conclusion, is the overall literary and emotional effect created by recent short stories for their implied readers? Perhaps the most salient feature of North Korean literature in contrast to its southern counterpart is its eternal optimism. In reawakening consciousness of difficulties in daily life, but by ultimately effacing them through the manipulations permitted in a fictive world, contemporary North Korean literature promises psychological comfort: its conventions allow readers the opportunity to yield temporarily to darker fears with the reassurance that a utopian redemption awaits at story's end. Regardless of moral failure on the part of the protagonist or details that point overwhelmingly toward hardship, as in "Tubôntche sangbong," all stories promise a better tomorrow, even at the expense of raising contradictions between a text's details and its final message. One might be tempted to apply the term "willing suspension of disbelief" to the fiction of the DPRK, but that phrase, which requires the acceptance of things we know not to be so (an essential element of such genres as science fiction), is perhaps not appropriate to

the DPRK's literature: rather, the texts rely on the reader's "willing acquiescence in belief" and eagerness to suppress cognitive dissonance in favor of the interpretation the texts themselves wish to dictate. The reader's role in the implicit contract established with the state and author, then, is to allow his or her faith in the system to be reaffirmed. Nonetheless, North Korean fiction on the cusp of the new millennium also provides ample scope for its audience to become "resisting readers"¹² and to rebel against the perspective imposed by the texts' conclusions. I have attempted to show how points of indeterminacy within these texts allow one to approach them not as a closed conversation but as an open dialogue. Of course, my analysis invites one crucial query: how do real North Korean readers choose to understand their fiction within the privacy of their own thoughts? That, I fear, is a question whose answer may be several years in coming.

The epigraph is drawn from "P'ungsônghan rojôkkarirûl nop'i ssalgo sae segirûl majunghagesûmnida" [Piling up Abundant Stacks of Grain, I Will Go Forth to Meet the New Year], *Chosôn munhak*, January 1999, 66. Please note that I generally follow MacCune-Reischauer romanization in this article, but also adopt common DPRK English spellings for specific people or places where they exist. This essay is a condensed version of "North Korean Short Stories on the Cusp of the New Millennium," originally published in *Acta Koreana* 5. – No. 1. – 2002. – pp. 33-50.

Notes:

¹*Juche* can probably best be defined as self-reliance, independence, or autonomy. The ideology of *Juche* is the fundamental guiding principle behind the North Korean approach to the world. It has connotations of nationalist pride and self-determination. Official DPRK policy titled the years 1996-97 the "arduous march" (konan ûi haenggun); after the proclamation of a victorious result at the end of 1997, terminology changed to the "socialist forced march" (sahûijuûi kanghaenggun) for the years 1998-99. For more on these terms see, e.g., www.yonhapnews.co.kr/ynafile/2000/nk/terms/p01.html, www.jungto.org/gf/kor/book/0216.html, and www.minji.or.kr/special/special0001-1.html, although note that these sources offer a slight divergence in dates. All these URLs were accessed on August 13, 2001.

²Kim first used the phrase in "Talk with Writers and Artists, June 30, 1951," in Kim Il Sung, *Works* (Pyongyang, 1981), 6:336-342.

³For comprehensive discussions of the relationship of ideology to the literature of the DPRK in English see Young-min Kwon, "Literature and Art in North Korea: Theory and Policy," *Korea Journal* 31, no. 2 (1991): 56-70; Yon-ho Suh, "The Revolutionary Operas and Plays in North Korea," *Korea Journal* 31, no. 3 (1991): 85-94; and especially Vladimir Pucek, "The Impact of *Juche* upon Literature and Arts," in Han S. Park, ed., *North Korea: Ideology, Politics, Economy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996), 51-70. Marshall Pihl's "Engineers of the Human Soul: North Korean Literature Today," *Korean Studies* 1 (1977): 63-110, makes valuable comments on style and comment as a whole, but does not engage in sustained analysis of a single story. Brian Myers's article on Soviet characters in North Korea fiction, "Mother Russia: Soviet Characters in North Korean Fiction," *Korean Studies* 16 (1992): 82-93), and his book-length treatment of Han Sôl-ya, *Han Sôl-ya and North Korean Literature: The Failure of Socialist Realism in the DPRK* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Series, 1994), are notable exceptions to the lack of analysis of individual stories, although his scorn for much of the work he examines is readily palpable. For helpful accounts of the role played by ideology in North Korean film, a field that has been subject to similar theoretical treatment in the DPRK, see Myung-jin Park, "Motion Pictures in North Korea," *Korea Journal* 31, no. 3 (1991): 95-103; Kyung-Hyun Kim, "The Fractured Cinema of North Korea: The Discourse of the Nation in *Sea of Blood*," in

Stephen Snyder and Xiaobing Ting, eds., *In Pursuit of Contemporary East Asian Culture* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 85-106; and Hyangjin Lee, "Conflicting Working-Class Identities in North Korean Cinema," *Korea Journal* 40, no. 3 (2000): 237-254.

⁴See, for example, Kim Chae-yong, *Pukhan munhak ûi yôksajôk ihae* (Seoul: Munhakkwajisôngsa, 1994); Shin Hyông-gi, *Pukhansosôl ûi ihae* (Seoul: Shilch'onmunhaksa, 1996); and Pak Tae-sang, *Pukhanmunhak ûi hyônsang* (Seoul: Kip'ûnsaem, 1999).

⁵Young-min Kwon, 57.

⁶"Sahoejuûigangsôngdaegukkônsoe-e chôkkûk ibajihal munhakchakp'um-ûl hwalbarhi ch'angch'akhaja," *Chosôn munhak*, January 1999, 5.

⁷Kim Chae-yong, 275.

⁸*Chosôn munhak*, September 1999, 49-58. For my translation of this story, see also a forthcoming issue of *Acta Koreana* 5, no. 2 (2002): 81-97.

⁹Kim Chae-yong, 283, and "'Konan ûi haenggun'kwa 1990 nyôndaehuban pukhanmunhak ûi kallyojuûi pip'an," *Munhwayesul* (2000): 6; also available at www.nkmunhak.jinju.or.kr/studybd/read.cgi?board=jykim, accessed 7/6/01 at 10:48 p.m.

¹⁰This skepticism reaches a climax when, during the course of guiding the reporter about, the narrator runs into an acquaintance whose simple honesty and faith in the North Korean system places the questions the Westerner asks in a ridiculous light: e.g., at one point the reporter asks his interlocutor what goods he possesses in his home, only to be met with uncomprehending complexity: "What a strange person! A house is for people, not for storing objects like a storeroom."

¹¹During my meeting with Han Ung-bin, the author made clear that he only intended the first interpretation, but I would nonetheless maintain that the second view can suggest itself. My point is, in fact, that such ambiguities leak into these recent texts even when they may not in any way be intended by their authors. Furthermore, although the story attempts to differentiate between a "worry" (*kôkchông*) and "anxiety" (*puran*) through the voice of the foreign journalist, the narrator's local acquaintance, significantly, is himself unable to understand the distinction.

¹²I use here the term first coined by feminist literary critic Judith Fetterley in a study that takes issue with the masculine bias in American literature that leads a reader "to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny." Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978). We may similarly apply her approach to a reader's possible reaction to the coerciveness of the values of Chuch'e ideology in North Korean literature. I would like to thank Charles Armstrong, Gregory Nicholas Evon, John Frankl, Frank Hoffmann, David Kosofsky, and Leonid Petrov for providing helpful comments on earlier drafts and/or assistance in securing difficult to obtain research materials. This paper is dedicated to the memory of Marshall Pihl.

Stephen Epstein, in translation

Available at <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article.php?lab=Encounter>
<http://www.actakoreana.org/>

After You Read

1. Give a brief outline of the modern North Korean literature mentioning the inner and outer conditions in which the DPRK's literature is being coined nowadays.
2. Express your opinion, answering the following question: how can a writer preserve his individual creativity working within rigid conventions of the state ideology?

Han Ung-bin “Second Encounter”

Before You Read

1. Stephen Epstein’s essay above gives a short insight of the story you are going to read – “Second Encounter”. Can you predict some events of the story?

2. To better understand Han Ung-bin’s story *"Second Encounter"* read this extract.

An official author bio from Han Ung-Bin is not available, but translator Stephen Epstein writes of meeting his work, and then the author himself: "I found 'Second Encounter' by reading through almost all the short fiction that appeared in the North Korean state-run literary magazine, *Chosŏn munhak* [Korean Literature], during 1998 and 1999. The story struck me as the most interesting and worthy of translation of any that I came across. I got in touch because I was part of a New Zealand delegation to Pyongyang in 2001, and we were asked for our wish list of whom we'd like to meet while there, and I put his name down. In the DPRK, such meetings are easily enough arranged if the higher-ups approve. "We had an interesting conversation. He seemed to me very kindhearted and I noted how extraordinarily gaunt he was - this despite being among at least a minor elite in the DPPK. Authors are well respected, although their relative salaries are not especially high. His faith and belief in his country came through very strongly to me. I'd asked if in fact he had ever been a guide to a foreigner in the story and he said, no, that was entirely made up, although he knew people who had and had asked them a bit about it. The Western journalist in the story is entirely a fiction. The other very interesting detail I recall him telling me is that he started his working life as a coal miner but enjoyed writing fiction in his spare time. He submitted some of his stories to journals and his talent was recognized. He was eventually taken to Pyongyang to be trained and to become a writer in the employ of the state (as all professional writers are)."

Available at: <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/?author=HanUng-bin>

3. Look at the following words used in the story. Match the words to the left with their definitions to the right.

- | | | |
|----------------|---|-----|
| 1 upheavals | a an unusual habit or way of behaving that someone has | |
| 2 oblivious | b to begin to sleep, when you do not intend to | 1 f |
| 3 to stem from | c to be confused and worried by something that you do not understand; puzzled | |
| 4 to astound | d not knowing about or not noticing something that is happening around you; unaware | |
| 5 propaganda | e a thought, idea, or detail that is important but difficult to | |

	notice or understand	
6 idiosyncrasy	f a very big change that often causes problems	
7 to nod off	g to feel or look shocked by something you have seen or just found out; stunned	
8 to be perplexed	h information which is false or which emphasizes just one part of a situation, used by a government or political group to make people agree with them	
9 to be aghast	i acting too quickly without thinking	
10 to trail behind smb	j food used to attract fish, animals, or birds so that you can catch them:	
11 hot-headed	k to make someone very surprised or shocked; to astonish	
12 wily	l stupid	
13 dim-witted	m to develop as a result of something else	
14 bait	n to walk slowly, especially because you are tired or bored, and often following other people	
15 subtlety	o clever at getting what you want, especially by tricking people; cunning	

4. Try to guess the meaning of the following expressions that will appear in the story. Use a dictionary if necessary. Write a short explanation for each of the phrases.

e.g. to cloud the country's image – to do sth that makes general opinion of the country less pleasant than it should have been

- to cloud the country's image
- to pour ice water down sb's backs
- to put sb in a tough spot
- to make sb's eyes pop out of his head
- to cloak a society's darker side
- to turn something into mishmash
- brains are mirrored on the brow

While reading the diary, find some other symbols. ¹ What do you suppose they represent?

Second Encounter *Han Ung-bin*

This is a story about something that took place over ten years ago, during the 13th World Youth Festival. It is now *Juche* Year 88 (1999).¹ Outside our window slogans on the street, visible everywhere, bear witness to the hardships we've suffered over the last ten years and the upheavals of today: "Let's make this year shine with a great transformation in building a strong and prosperous country!" "Let's continue the arduous march vigorously onward to paradise!"

¹ North Korea has its own dating system, the *Juche* calendar, which treats the year of Kim Il Sung's birth, 1912, as Year 1. The original text gives both dates. (translator's note)

But why am I bringing up a story from ten years ago? Here I am watching television with my daughter who has come home from school; on the screen workers across the country are struggling to construct a prosperous nation. Why should I be urging my thoughts back from today to an event of ten years past?

I've decided to save the answer for the end.

I participated as a guide and interpreter a decade ago during the summer of *Juche* Year 78 (1989) at the 13th World Youth Festival . . .

That year the World Youth Festival was being held in Asia for the first time. People the world over made a huge commotion. The fuss they were making amazed me; you'd have thought it was being held on another planet. Would we be able to show off P'yôngyang, the capital of our fatherland, and rightly claim it as the home of friendship, goodwill, and solidarity against imperialism? Would we be able to say that the World Youth Festival, upon being held for the thirteenth time, had finally returned to its birthplace?

I felt an urgent sense of mission: I had to show the foreign participants the true face of our most wonderful and outstanding socialist fatherland, Korea, the land of *Juche*. And balancing that was my fervent wish that even the most trifling item that could cloud our country's image would be absent.

Although the majority of the foreigners who came to visit possessed understanding and goodwill toward us, others were only half-believing. A very small minority even had hostile feelings.

I had long since learned a bit about "the Western World" with its fondness for circulating rumors where the socialist system was concerned; they would say that the entire tree was withering on the basis of a single dry leaf. At one point "they" had taken pictures of high-rise apartment buildings together with shops in small makeshift structures below and published them in the newspaper. The captions offered the bizarre explanation that the high-rise apartments were for the elite and that laborers dwelled in the low houses, which were in fact shops.

I therefore hoped that during the festival everything would be even more wonderful so that they could find nothing to carp at. I hoped that people would dress more attractively, that their smiles would be brighter and friendlier, that every single ornamental bulb would be more splendid! I felt a displeasure that I could hardly contain when our countrymen answered foreigners' questions brusquely or in a fumbling manner (and such cases were not absent) or when I saw them, faces flushed, making a racket while waiting in line at drink or fruit stands. Why did they have to slake their thirst at *that* stand? Why did they have to have fruit *now*? Every time I saw people standing in line at a bus stop I wanted to shout, "Ladies and gentlemen! Can't you just walk a stop or two?"

I realize now how futile my concern was. It was no different from worrying that a few bubbles floating up from time to time on the surface of a river might give the impression that its water isn't clear. But at the time I felt nothing but nervousness and dread. That was ten years ago and, what's more, at that point I had never met foreigners before . . .

Of course I can't say my apprehension at the time stemmed entirely from ignorance: once the foreigner I was accompanying saw someone standing idly in front of a drink stand; his unexpected question stunned me into silence.

"So he's standing around like that because he doesn't have any money?"

"Pardon?"

His question implied the man was begging.

Their fantastic notions astounded me on more than one or two occasions. I could only marvel at their ability to come up with such curious ideas.

But several of our own countrymen were completely unaware of their idiosyncrasies. Such was the man who met us in front of the drink stand. He was in his mid-thirties and his high forehead gave him an intelligent look. His gaze was sharp and the sun reflecting on his completely unwrinkled brow sparkled as much as his eyes-the sort of face people mean when they use the phrase "brains are mirrored on the brow."

"Excuse me. I'm sorry, but why are you standing here?" I asked.

"I'm meeting someone." Suspicion and displeasure appeared on his face simultaneously. "Why?"

I first explained who I was. "How does it look if you wait around in front of a drink stand with all these foreign guests? He thinks you're standing here because you don't have any money."

"Don't have any money?" He looked back and forth between the foreigner and me, blinking. "What a strange person. Why would I be standing around if I didn't have money?"

Even this man, despite the intelligence reflected on his face, was thoroughly incapable of coming up with the word "beg." So there's no need to mention other people. Indeed, during the more than one week period I spent with the foreigner, even I could do nothing but look at him in astonished doubt a few times.

Not until I prompted the bystander with the term "beg" did he understand the import of the foreigner's question. His brow immediately grew red, his rage unmistakable.

"And you, comrade, took that silently? As his guide, you have to stamp those ideas out. Crush them! What does he think of us . . .? If that's not a challenge, then what is it?"

I had to sweat that day as a result of the foreigner and this "intelligent man."

Given this incident, you won't have much trouble guessing the worry I felt wherever I accompanied the foreigner. And it wasn't just simple grandmotherly solicitude that made me feel a heightened sense of worry: in all truthfulness, my traveling partner was very unusual. He was a journalist from some Western nation and an exceedingly fussy companion. He had a reporter's curiosity (which I liked) but a skepticism to match. He thought everything in socialist countries had been deliberately set up for the purpose of propaganda. Not until we went to see the splendor of Kwangbok Street firsthand did I have the impression he believed it was a street on which people actually lived rather than a film set.

He would frequently express doubt when I explained various things and squint at me as though playing the clown. It made me annoyed and uneasy every time

he did that, and I grew irritated that I couldn't figure out what it would take to convince him. I wanted to find something that would make his eyes pop out of his head and make him stare until his neck grew stiff. But I couldn't figure out what that something would be.

But one day (perhaps the day before the festival ended?) I went out with him to the walkway along the Pot'ong River. I had intended to take him to some memorial or to an enchanting art performance, but he shook his head.

"I believe you one hundred percent about your outstanding architectural skills. World standard. The May 1 Stadium in particular is in a class of its own."

I was at a loss for words, unable to divine swiftly what he was going to say.

"Nevertheless", he looked at me almost craftily with a meaningful smile- "Ancient Rome also had its splendid buildings. And today New York is a forest of skyscrapers. Still, Harlem exists beneath those skyscrapers. Ancient Rome had its Harlem too. It's not in any source, but I have no doubt that when the Colosseum was closed the poor lived there. Those details probably just wound up getting pushed aside by writings that praise its magnificence. History offers ample proof of how splendid monuments cloak a society's darker side and add to the dignity of incompetent rulers. The bigger the house, the bigger the shadows."

I was speechless-his ideas turned past and present into a mishmash. Apparently as far as he was concerned there was no such thing as historical development, just a process of constant repetition.

"There would seem to be some truth in what you are saying. But in our country..."

"Yes, I know. You're going to say it's different?"

A tricky smile was reflected in his eyes. To use the metaphors they're so fond of, you'd have to say it was the smile of a devil.

"Well, let's go back to yesterday. You said yourself that there used to be a 'Harlem' in this beautiful city of yours as well, right?"

"Do you mean T'osôngnang?"

"Yes, yes, that's it, T'osônran. Let's go there."

And so we headed out to the banks of the Pot'ong River.

My companion refused to believe that the remains of the unhappiness, tears, contemptuous treatment, and disgrace of the T'osongnang era had been buried beneath the splendor of the gymnasium, the People's Palace of Culture, the ice skating rink. But enough of our conversation-what I want to talk about here is not the past and the present. Maybe it would be most precise to say it's about the "present" of ten years ago and the present of today.

Thick-trunked Korean poplars that give the impression of having been growing since time immemorial line the banks of the Pot'ong River between Pot'ong Bridge and Mansu Bridge. Nonetheless, if you cut into the trunks of those huge trees, you'd find their rings told a tale no more than forty-three or forty-four years old. Their age is consistent with the reconstruction that began after the war.

If you go in among them you will encounter the humid, astringent scent of rotting leaves decomposing into dark, fertile soil and people digging it up for

their flowerpots. Because the trees are so tall and lush, neither the streets on the other side of the Mansu Bridge with their tall, gray buildings nor the splendid "Tower Street" on the opposite bank of the Pot'ong River are readily visible. The poplars' long-stemmed, slender leaves rustled softly in the wind, the quiet twittering of birds wafting like the breeze among them. The street noise contributed to the impression of a constant chirping from the city's birds. I felt as though I had entered a deep forest.

Upon setting foot within it, my fussy companion appeared to forget momentarily this mundane world. His eyes gleamed as he gazed up at the trees.

As I walked beside him, I pondered what had given rise to the finicky skepticism of his that doubted everything that confronted it in the first instance . . . Personality is said to reveal a man's history; it is not something simple that appears in a day or two.

Suspicion is a product of dissatisfaction. How could you go on living if you were perpetually dissatisfied? And life is long; it doesn't just last a day or two. . . . I felt my annoyance and displeasure with him melt away slightly. I even felt an inward sense of pity toward him. Yes, I pitied him-this journalist who boasted of having his name appear in publications all over the world. What is as suffocating and oppressive to a human being as dissatisfaction? He had said proudly to me, "I've got a house, a wife, and a son. I've got my own car. I'm blessed. I don't have any reason to worry about being laid off yet."

Yet. That could refer to a day far in the future, but it could mean tomorrow or maybe even just an hour later. Nevertheless, he said he was blessed. Could happiness and dissatisfaction truly coexist? Is there such a thing as dissatisfied happiness? If there were, wouldn't such happiness merit pity?

As usual there were a middling number of people along the riverside. Not a lot, but not inconsiderable. If the Taedong River walkway is bustling and crowded, then the Pot'ong's is calm yet vital. There were more people sitting on benches or on the grass than walking-people reading, playing chess, chatting. . . . Even the strollers added to the atmosphere of peace and quiet.

Fishermen sat side by side at the river's edge, as though forming a column of soldiers. Although they appeared both sunk in contemplation and impatient, it was nonetheless a strange "procession," merry and full of life. Thoroughly oblivious to the activity going on around them, they kept their eyes fixed on the bobbers floating on the surface of the water, as though life's most profound truths were hidden within the river that held their lines. I hesitated without realizing it as the foreigner and I walked slowly toward them: a middle school classmate whom I had met on the streets frequently over the past twenty years was included among that meditative procession. Having cast his line in the water, he sat puffing on a cigarette.

Nevertheless, I decided to walk behind him a little more quickly instead of making a show of recognizing him: it was difficult to predict exactly what would happen if we stood face to face. Even in middle school he had placed comrades in awkward situations more than once or twice. In our fourth year, an

incident that occurred when we were having our Ch'öllima class inspection made his naive simplicity an eternal topic of conversation.

Aware that the inspection was coming, we had spent the previous fortnight busily putting our drill books in order, making extracts from newspaper magazines and preparing scrapbooks, arranging the classroom and so on. Just to cite one example, we had polished and scrubbed the classroom floor until you could see the reflection of your eyebrows when you looked down at it.

The inspection went off successfully. But at the end of one meeting (a sort of question and answer session), "my friend" was nodding off and caught the eye of one of the team of inspectors.

"Didn't you sleep well last night, son?" The atmosphere was warm and friendly, and the remark was closer to a joke than a question demanding a response, the sort of thing that you could pass over with a silent blush, but he stood up, looking as though he'd just tumbled out of bed.

"No sir, I didn't sleep well."

"And why is that?"

"I was tidying up the classroom."

"What sort of cleaning were you doing that kept you up all night?"

His next answer poured ice water down our backs. "Because we heard a class inspection was coming. . . ."

"?!"

Although more than twenty years had passed, our conversations when we ran into each other made it obvious he hadn't changed one iota. He was as simple and literal-minded as ever. His tendency to take jokes seriously regularly left his interlocutors feeling awkward.

What would happen if he were to meet this finicky foreigner? They were an extraordinarily ill-matched pair. I hastened our pace without explanation. Just a few more steps, and we would pass all the way behind him. But at that moment a group of youth passed by, swinging a cassette player that boomed out a song. The sound of the song getting louder and softer surged within the shaken cassette player like waves.

"I can't live outside your embrace . . .

I can't live outside your embrace . . ."

My friend turned toward the young men. There was no escape from his sharp gaze. Our eyes wound up meeting.

"Ah-Comrade Pak!"

I intended to pass by as though I hadn't heard, but my companion looked at him.

"Isn't he calling you?" Exactly what I had feared was coming to pass. "There's a saying 'any friend of yours is a friend of mine.' May I speak with him?"

It's difficult for me to recall how I got through that hour. At times I felt as though my face were roasting in a bonfire, while at other moments it was though my spine had been doused with a bucket of ice water. The questions or answers darted along in a completely unpredictable fashion. I found myself breathless trying to keep up with it all.

"Do you have a job?" Such was the first query from my companion.

Instead of answering, my friend asked me a question in return with a dubious look. "Are there people without jobs? Come on."

I had no choice but to explain to him that almost every country in the world had unemployment and that in my companion's country the number of jobless was not insignificant. I informed the reporter that he worked as an assembler in a machine factory.

"Do you have a house?"

Once more my friend questioned me rather than responding. "What kind of house?"

"The house you live in, of course-what other house would it be?"

"What is he talking about? How can anyone live without a house?"

I was both aghast and angry. He was acting as though he were having a conversation with me, not the foreigner. "Don't you ever look at the papers? Haven't you read that there are lots of homeless people in the world?"

"Aha!-" At that moment my dim-witted friend let forth a long exclamation, as though beginning to understand. "So that's the kind of country he comes from?" He looked at him with a vague expression of pity and shook his head. "Life must be hard."

I could not translate his words as they were, so I said my friend lived in a home that had an attached bath and toilet.

"Ahhhhh-" The lengthy sound emitted by my companion carried not admiration, but rather considerable disappointment at my friend's possession of both a job and a home.

At that moment another group of young people walked by, carrying a cassette player blaring music. There were quite a few cassette players.

My friend turned from this "unfortunate" inhabitant of capitalist society to the cassette player. Following his gaze, my companion quickly asked, "Don't you have one at home?"

My friend shook his head. "No."

There was no need to translate.

"He said no, right?" My companion grew excited. The conversation was turning in the direction I had dreaded.

Life is not always made up of satisfaction. There are shortages and times of dissatisfaction. But if the conversation were to travel along those lines . . .?

I spoke to my friend in a low voice. "Think carefully before you answer."

"What?"

My friend couldn't even make out what I said, but my companion perceived the extent of his obtuseness. He flashed a victorious smile at me. "Please don't interfere. I wish to speak with your friend."

I shrugged. "Aren't you already speaking with him?"

"That's true. But please translate what he says exactly. Don't let it turn out like Molière's Turkish."

My irritation rose. "I am translating exactly." I pointed to the recorder he was carrying and said coolly, "You're going to confirm things later, aren't you?"

"Oh, I'm not doubting you at all. Not in the least."

And so began the "interview" between my cunning companion and my friend whose simple-mindedness knew no bounds.

"If you don't have a cassette player at home, then what do you have?"

At this point even my friend, if he possessed a modicum of perception, had to see where this "respectable" foreign journalist was trying to lead him. But my friend responded readily without appearing to think especially hard.

"I've got four children and a wife."

Again I was forced to explain. "He's asking what kind of goods you have at home."

"Goods?" My friend blinked, as was his habit when he was perplexed. "What a strange person. A home is for people, not for goods, like a storehouse."

I was so taken aback I couldn't suppress a laugh. But nevertheless I was supposed to interpret, and exactly at that. "He says a home is a place for people, not a storehouse for goods."

"Ah, I'm sorry." The journalist apologized, apparently thinking he had made his interviewee uncomfortable. He was polite to a fault. But I saw that a hunter's craftiness and patience lurked behind his courteous manners.

"Do all your children go to school?"

"Only two."

"Only two?" My companion grew excited. He raised his two middle fingers and counted them off. "There are two who can't attend school?"

"That's right."

My friend nodded promptly when he saw the two raised fingers, as though admiring the foreigner's quick arithmetic. As before, he had not guessed that the foreigner was digging for information with a particular aim in mind.

"What do the two children who don't go to school do?"

"What do they do? One goes to kindergarten and the smallest is at a nursery."

"Pardon?" My companion simply stared vacantly at my friend, while he, with equal lack of comprehension, simply looked back at him, blinking.

It would have been difficult to find more contrasting conversationalists than these two: a wily journalist, trying to disguise his real intentions and tossing out questions in order to receive hoped-for answers, and my friend, naive to the point of foolishness, without a clue what these questions were fishing for, answering unreflectively. Their dialogue seemed to flow smoothly, but at the same time, when one talked of chalk, the other spoke of cheese. The journalist would at first grow pleased the conversation was being dragged in the direction he intended, but then he had no choice but to realize his satisfaction was over answers that missed the point of what he was asking. It was a confrontation between fully armed cunning and completely defenseless simplicity.

It will probably be better at this point to relay their conversation without further explanation.

Journalist: I imagine you must have a lot of worries with four children.

Friend: I can't relax a single day.

Journalist: Yes, that must be the case. (This response raised his spirits, of course). What's your biggest worry?

Friend: That my kids will be distracted by toys and won't pay proper attention to their schoolwork. And the one in kindergarten is such a troublemaker that he causes a ruckus every day. Just yesterday he let tap water run all over the kitchen floor so he could sail paper boats on it. The water ran through the corridor all the way down to the lower floor. It was a huge mess. Things like that are making me grow old before my time.

Journalist: (Momentarily silent). I don't quite follow. (This exchange had also been a case of chalk and cheese).

Journalist: How much do you earn per month?

Friend: I did pretty well this month. I even received a bonus as a prize.

Journalist: How much do you make in dollars?

Friend: Well, let's see.

Journalist: Let's say ninety or one hundred dollars.

Friend: Whatever.

Journalist: Can six people live on that money?

Friend: Of course.

Journalist: I don't follow again.

Friend: Now, really!

Journalist: Well, let's talk this over. Do you intend to send all your children to school?

Friend: They can't go anywhere else.

Journalist: Do they get sick sometimes?

Friend: Yes, certainly. They catch colds and . . .

Journalist: And you still have to eat, don't you? Six people . . .

Friend: Ah, sure.

Journalist: Fine. (Rubbing his hands together in satisfaction, the preparations for his attack having been laid). But how can you do all that on your income?

Friend: Why do you think I wouldn't be able to?

Journalist: First you have to pay rent, right? My income is quite high, but more than half goes to housing costs.

Friend: More than half? (Surprise). Then I guess he doesn't earn more than twenty won a month. (Looking at me as he said this, of course).

Journalist: No, it's much more than that.

Friend: At any rate, if more than half of your income is for rent, it wouldn't seem to be more. We pay about ten won a month.

I explained to the journalist that in our country we actually don't pay rent, but simply a maintenance fee. He fell silent. After a while the conversation resumed.

Journalist: You need money to send your children to school, don't you?

Friend: Money? Why?

Journalist: Why? Don't you have teachers at school?

Friend: Of course we do.

Journalist: And there are classrooms, teaching equipment, furnishings, etc.?

Friend: Sure.

Journalist: Then don't you have to pay?

Friend: Why would we have to pay? It's a school. Of course it has all those things.

Journalist: Huh?

The conversation returned to its starting point. If I don't edit at all, then dialogue in which the phrase "Why are you asking?" will recur without end. I had long ago explained to my companion that our nation had a free education system, but when I did, he merely grumbled peevishly without looking at me, "I've heard that story before."

In a sense you could look at this as ignorance bred by suspicion. Skepticism can make people intelligent, but it can also have the opposite result.

Journalist: Let's leave that subject. What do you do when your children are sick?

Friend: We go to the clinic or the hospital.

Journalist: And I presume you have to pay there.

Friend: Why?

Journalist: Well, they have to receive treatment or be hospitalized, don't they?

Friend: But why would we have to pay?

Journalist: ?

Again the conversation returned to where it had started.

I myself could not readily come up with the proper response. Only after several minutes did the words "universal free health care" occur to me. I discovered once more that if you live in a system since the day you are born, you think that is how the rest of the world is. Rather I grew surprised at these other ways of life, maybe because custom can truly be called a second form of nature.

Nevertheless, I didn't tell my companion of my "discovery," because it was obvious that he would say, "So I've heard." Suspicion can bring someone who is smart and perceptive to real extremes . . . Again, I felt an emotion akin to a sort of pity for my companion.

Still, my journalist companion refused to retreat. Tenacity seemed to be a quality inherent to his occupation.

"So you're saying you don't need money?"

"Why wouldn't I need it? I need it to buy my children soft drinks or to give them rides on airplanes . . . amusement rides, I mean . . ."

The journalist shrugged and stretched his arms outward in incomprehension. My friend regarded his wide outstretched arms with amusement and looked at him blinkingly. Assuming the conversation had ended, he turned back to his fishing rod. . . .

The interview fell flat in the end.

I don't remember what I thought at the time. I do recall looking enviously across the river to the boardwalk in front of the People's Palace of Culture: there at the boat dock several foreigners and Koreans were laughing raucously together, taking photos, and exchanging addresses. I probably also wondered regretfully why I had not been assigned to guide one of those friendly foreigners. I had already given up the idea that my companion might become sympathetic to our cause. . . .

At that point another fisherman appeared and began to set out his equipment next to my friend. He seemed to be a very impatient person. When his fishing line got tangled and didn't unravel right, he tugged at it suddenly and burst into anger. "Ugh! You jerk! I just . . ."

My friend, who had been watching him with his head tilted, gave a happy cry. "Comrade Foreman! What are you doing here?" "Huh?" The man turned. But rather than greeting his happiness in kind, he instead said "Comrade?" and looked away. He looked even angrier, but my friend hurried over to help as though he had received the warmest possible greeting. He drew the tangled fishing line toward him and issued a continuous stream of "directives."

"Ah, ah, don't tug it . . . Like this . . . Like this . . . Pull it out this way . . . Right . . . Right . . . There! Would you like some bait?"

"I've got my own bait!" The friendly gesture met with a blunt refusal. Something unpleasant must have occurred between the two.

The foreman was obviously unusually hot-headed. As soon as he cast his fishing line, he turned to my friend. "What in the world was that about yesterday? How can somebody do that? You're not satisfied until you've cut down your foreman in front of the whole factory?"

My friend's eyes immediately grew wide. "What? When did I ever insult you?"

"Don't play innocent! We're in the middle of the first successful test run of the automation system, and you say if I had given my approval earlier, it would have happened three months ago? What did you mean by that? You're not satisfied unless you spoil a happy occasion with that kind of remark?"

My friend blinked violently. "Why is that insulting you? It just popped into my head and it was true . . ."

"Look here! Don't pretend you don't know!"

I could guess at once what had transpired. It was clear that something had taken place similar to what had happened during our school days. He had put the foreman in a tough spot during a successful trial run, just like he had with us long ago during the Ch'Å'llima class inspection.

"Are you saying I did something wrong?"

The foreman cast him a disdainful look. "Who said you did something wrong? I'm fully aware you're a straight shooter, Comrade Kang. Sometimes people don't like you, but I know there isn't a single person who doesn't think you're right. . . . Still . . ."

My friend appeared a bit flustered by this left-handed compliment. "Well . . . you can't say that the test run occurred three months ahead of schedule . . . I should have said something else. It's just that I was so excited . . ."

"Of all the . . ." The foreman's anger appeared to have subsided somewhat.

"Enough," he sighed. That's what people expect from you, Comrade Kang."

That's what you expect from Comrade Kang. You could say that summed up my friend. There are many people like him in our society, people whom it's impossible to hate even when their frankness makes for awkward situations.

"What are they talking about?"

I explained to the journalist that the production line had been automated at my friend's factory. I was concerned how I'd explain the ill will between the two. How would I be able to make him understand how a worker had "criticized" his foreman. . . .

But to my surprise he nodded vigorously before I could even speak.

"I can figure it out!"

"?!"

I was stunned. Figure it out? Compared with his earlier incomprehension this was an astonishing advance. A leap! He continued excitedly, pleased with his own "progress."

"I understand why there are bad feelings."

"?"

I grew suspicious. Had he merely been feigning ignorance of Korean up until now? If not, how could he understand the subtleties of the relationship between these two?

"Shall I tell you?" He was exultant. "They're depressed because going to automation means they'll lose their jobs, right?"

"Pardon?" I burst into laughter in spite of myself. I couldn't help it. A saying came to mind: "No matter how big your steps are, you can't outrun your pants." I think it's a European proverb. No matter how many leaps a person takes, he can't escape the constraints of his own life, just as the monk Xuan Zang in *Journey to the West*, for all his greatness, can't exceed the grasp of the Buddha's palm. My companion's dazzling "progress" also remained progress within the confines of his own life.

"Why are you laughing?"

"Please excuse me." I was going to explain the content of their conversation, but he flashed a shrewd smile and parried my words amicably.

Saying he wished to speak to my friend directly, he turned to him. "What do you think of the introduction of automation?"

"I'm delighted."

"Have you forgotten that an automated system might be able to perform your work instead of you?"

"That's a good thing."

"A good thing? If your job disappears?"

"If my job disappears?"

"Won't you lose your job if an automated system can perform the work you used to do?"

There was no way my friend would understand the tenor of an argument used by the various Luddites who have appeared in history. He looked over at me in confusion.

"I don't get what he means."

This was not simply a case of question and answer at cross-purposes but a complete breakdown in communication. The longer the conversation proceeded, the higher the wall of misunderstanding grew-more as a result of their mutual

inability to comprehend their respective complexity or simplicity than the two opposing systems from which they came.

I could not restrain my impatience and said to my friend, "Can't you just say we don't have unemployment in our country?"

"What? Are you telling me he doesn't know that?" Stunned, my friend started to grow angry with me. "What do you want me to say to somebody who doesn't know the first thing about our country!"

I was taken aback by his speaking so frankly and recklessly, because the journalist carried a recorder. Later he would be able to have whatever my friend said translated exactly.

I delivered my friend's remarks after "processing" them so they would be softer. "He says that you wouldn't ask such questions when you learn about our country."

The journalist's face seemed to pale a bit. He pressed my friend in an almost challenging manner: "You're telling me then that you don't have the slightest anxiety about your house or your job?"

A single "That's right" would have sufficed here, but my sincere friend was intent upon giving the courtesy of a concrete answer.

"Of course I do. I'm concerned about whether we can accomplish the goals we've decided upon for the month or that we might produce goods that aren't up to standard. And as for my house, my kids. . . ."

"Those aren't anxieties, they're worries."

"Huh? What's the difference between anxieties and worries?"

"Oh, never mind, never mind." The journalist quickly stood up. "Let's go!"

I could not help being surprised at the sudden declaration that the interview had closed. This "gentleman," who had made a point of excessive politeness in every circumstance, had simply stood up without his partner's leave. This was clear rudeness.

But at that moment I felt suspicion more strongly than displeasure over his rudeness. He had boasted about having traveled virtually all over the world and had not shown surprise, admiration, or even changed expression over anything splendid, magnificent, or beautiful. How could my friend's simple, unremarkable words cause his expression to change so frequently and make him lose his innate gentlemanly composure? Was he disappointed over his extreme simple-mindedness?

At any rate, the interview was a failure. A complete flop! Thus I thought as I trailed behind him.

After walking a few steps, the journalist turned toward me. I assumed he was about to apologize for his rudeness, since he was the sort of person who said "I'm sorry" after just grazing another's sleeve while walking in the street.

But the words that issued from his lips were not an apology. "It's impossible not to know some sort of anxiety. Even God, if he were being frank, would probably say there is anxiety in heaven. Zeus also lived in anxiety. Modern life is anxiety heaped on anxiety. But . . . he says that he doesn't know anxiety?"

He still hadn't realized his rude behavior. I couldn't understand. What in the world was it about my friend's words that so confused this "gentleman"?

"Didn't you hear him firsthand?"

" . . . "

We walked, the rich black soil meeting our footfalls with spongy resilience. Moist air, the heady scent of rotting leaves-the fresh scent of the earth being perpetually renewed.

A little way ahead a young girl with a red kerchief around her neck was loading soil for flowerpots into a basin. She saw my companion and quickly stood up to give him the Youth Brigade's salute, beaming a smile. The slender tips of her fingers were smeared with moist, dark soil, an attractive sight.

After passing several steps beyond her, my companion suddenly stopped. He turned back to look at the girl, and a subtle smile flashed on his face as he regarded me. He had the expression of someone who has seen through a secret another has strived hard to conceal. "You people are truly amazing!"

"Yes?" I looked at him dubiously. What was so amazing? Was this admiration or scorn? His next words, however, left me speechless.

"Was that man really a worker?"

What was he talking about!? I just stared at him. He became even more triumphant at my silence.

"There's no way he can be a worker!" He answered his own question, growing even more enthusiastic.

I thought he was joking. I almost laughed, but he kept speaking seriously without a smile. "If your friend is really a worker, then I can't help but admire the way you have prepared even your laborers!"

"I beg your pardon!?"

What brought this about? Was there something particular my friend had said? No, he was just telling things as they were. It was true he said he had no anxiety about the basic necessities, food and clothing, but he hardly led a luxurious lifestyle. . . . So what was it that made this thoroughly ordinary life seem more unrealistic to this foreigner than grand streets or artistic performances . . .? Our lifestyle, our day-to-day way of living that we are as used to as the air. . . .

"Every life has some anxiety."

I didn't answer. Silently, I pondered myself and my own life. And I pondered life in this country of ours, where the completely frank answers of a laborer could make a journalist who has traveled the world over believe that they were merely "propaganda" for the socialist system.

Something fell from above-a green leaf, perhaps dislodged by a cheerful bird, or the cool breeze off the Pot'ong River. It glided slowly to the ground in front of us. A sunbeam quietly followed, piercing the lush foliage. As the wind blew, the net of light shimmered like waves.

At that moment I suddenly recalled a documentary I had seen of the earth as viewed from a satellite. From the pictures shown it had been difficult to imagine the land I dwell in and see every day. If there had been no explanation that it was the earth, I would have concluded it was another planet. . . . Perhaps this

was precisely the same difference between how our way of life appeared in our own eyes and those of the foreigner, how it appeared from close up and from far away. . . .

Nearly ten years have passed since then. . . . Ten years, but those ten years have not simply been 3,650 days. Tears come to my eyes, unbidden. During the last ten years we have gone through a great number of calamities. We've experienced more upheavals than people in other eras faced in a whole century. With the collapse of socialism, the Soviet Union, which had seemed eternal, splintered into several capitalist nations and almost all socialist countries collapsed in succession and reverted to capitalism. Our socialist fatherland is under siege from global imperialism. In the midst of all this, our nation suffered an enormous trauma, as the Great Leader, the founder of socialist Korea, left our side. And from that point for several years in a row we have suffered destructive natural disasters, as though nature itself had formed an alliance with the imperialists and their policy to isolate and choke us with a blockade.

And so we embarked on the "arduous march." In the 1990s we once more set out on the arduous march that the patriots of old traveled sixty years before. The "arduous march" has ended, but more than a few difficulties remain. We have shortages of more than a few things. Our decorative lights and streetlamps are dark.

Knock, knock, knock. The sound of someone at our door interrupted my thoughts.

It was the leader of our neighborhood unit. "Please go to the clinic for a vaccination-"

"A vaccination?" My daughter, who had been watching television, grumbled worriedly, and my wife came in from the kitchen and immediately started to scold her.

"You have to change your clothes as soon as you get home from school. What are you doing?"

My daughter reluctantly got up, pouting. "That's all you ever say."

Every evening almost without fail this mother-daughter bickering repeated. My daughter liked the school uniform she had been issued this time and was loath to take it off, while my wife would say, "With life so hard these days, how can you . . .?" Things could hardly be different, given this uniform that led to tears.

Outside our window it was gloomy, with streetlamps only lit at intervals. Car headlights were also but few.

Nevertheless . . . I returned to the thoughts that the knock from the neighborhood leader had interrupted. What had really changed in our lives? What have we lost . . .? Until ten years ago we hadn't known. Everything was habit with us. Only when socialism collapsed in several countries and they reverted to capitalism did we realize afresh just how much we had. Moscow, Warsaw . . . the streets overflowing with the unemployed, the homeless, children who had lost their schools, people breathing their last outside hospital gates. . . . Nevertheless, nevertheless! Our way of life.

Everything is scarce and difficult, but we have lost nothing. Our way of life, our way of life still continues on in its track, unchanged.

On the other side of the road, illuminated by the streetlights and the headlights of the trams and cars, a slogan stood out as though breathing: "Let's make this year shine with a great transformation in building a strong and prosperous country!" And our Kwangmyôngsông Satellite Number One will be speeding along constantly in infinite space, a scout for our great nation.

From the corridor came the sound of knocking at each and every door. A receding voice called without interruption, "Please hurry to the clinic for a shot!"

...

Now I have to tell you why today I wanted to look back upon something that happened a decade before: it's because today I met that finicky foreigner from ten years ago. Of course, this second encounter wasn't direct, but occurred via the newspaper pages. . . .

This is what he wrote: "I used to think that people everywhere throughout the modern world lived without a future, that nothing existed but desperation and anxiety. But today I have discovered a land where people live with boundless hope for the future-North Korea, which I am revisiting after ten years.

"Ten years ago in this land the ornamental lamps on the roads were enchanting and glimmering; the dazzling streetlights were like the pattern of a night butterfly's wings. At that time I did not believe that the people of this land lived in ignorance of anxiety.

"Nevertheless, ten years have passed, and, having traveled through several nations in Eastern Europe, I have come to realize as I walk through the roads of this land that, although few decorations are illuminated and the street lights are dim today, this indeed is a nation that knows neither desperation nor anxiety, a land filled with confidence in the future. . . ."

This translation was originally published in Acta Koreana 5, no. 2 (2002): 81-97.

Available at: <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article.php?lab=Encounter>

After You Read

1. What is the form of the story? How does it help the author to convey his ideas?
2. a) Explain the use of the pronoun *they* in the following context sentence: "At one point "they" had taken pictures of high-rise apartment buildings together with shops in small makeshift structures below and published them in the newspaper.
b) Consider some passages from the text describing the author's apprehension of his fatherland, socialist North Korea, its people and the other nations of the world.

“I had long since learned a bit about "the Western World" with its fondness for circulating rumors where the socialist system was concerned; they would say that the entire tree was withering on the basis of a single dry leaf.”

“He was a journalist from some Western nation and an exceedingly fussy companion. ... He thought everything in socialist countries had been deliberately set up for the purpose of propaganda.”

“At that moment I suddenly recalled a documentary I had seen of the earth as viewed from a satellite. From the pictures shown it had been difficult to imagine the land I dwell in and see every day. If there had been no explanation that it was the earth, I would have concluded it was another planet. . . . Perhaps this was precisely the same difference between how our way of life appeared in our own eyes and those of the foreigner, how it appeared from close up and from far away. . . .”

Find more examples illustrating the author’s ideas.

3. What particular issues was the western reporter interested in? How did the author feel about the questions his classmate was asked? If you were the western journalist, what questions would you put a Korean?

4. Search for words and phrases illustrating the narrator’s attitude towards the journalist and his interlocutor. Has it changed by the end of the story?

5. Is there a difference in understanding anxieties and worries mentioned in the text by different people?

6. Find examples of allusion in the text.

7. Consider the use of the euphemism in the following context sentence: “In the midst of all this, our nation suffered an enormous trauma, as the Great Leader, the founder of socialist Korea, *left our side*”. Suggest other ways to convey the same meaning. Comment on the style of the language they belong to.

8. Think of the stylistic effect achieved by repetition of *Nevertheless* in the text. Find more examples of the use of the same stylistic device.

9. Find the following proverbs and sayings in the text. Think of the context they are used in and explain their meaning. Think of their Ukrainian equivalents.

- The bigger the house, the bigger the shadows.
- Personality is said to reveal a man’s history.
- Suspicion is a product of dissatisfaction.
- Any friend of yours is a friend of mine.
- When one talked of chalk, the other spoke of cheese.
- No matter how big your steps are, you can’t outrun your pants.

10. Look at the following words and word combinations from the text. Match the words to the left with their synonyms to the right. Some of the words can have more than one equivalent. Define the shades of meaning in each pair or group of synonyms.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| to make a commotion | to disguise |
| bizarre | conversationalist |
| interlocutor | to conceal |
| | to cause a ruckus |
| to fall flat | to go through calamities |
| | to make a fuss |
| to suffer over hardships | awkward |
| to fish for | to be a failure |
| | to think |
| to cloak | to dig for |
| to ponder | to be a flop |

e.g. **to make a commotion** - *to cause a ruckus, to make a fuss*

11. Consider the groups of synonyms met in the text. Make up sentences eliciting the shades of meaning in each group:

- a) to look at smb, to give smb a look, to squint at smb, to blink at smb, to stare at smb, to gaze;
- b) to smile at smb, to flash a smile, to beam a smile.

12. Restore the collocations from the text. Translate them into Ukrainian. The example is done for you.

Beginning	Ending	Restored collocation	Translation
fervent	proof		
trifling	to carp at		
futile	pair		
to slake	the conversation		
ample	ignorance of sth		
find sth	wish		
the smile	fee		
left-handed	thirst		
mundane	look		
not to change	will		
to resume	item		

to feign	world		
a maintenance	of a devil		
ill	concern		
dubious	compliment	left-handed compliment	сумнівний комплімент
ill-matched	one iota		

13. Dwell on the function of the sentences in terms of modality.

"Let's make this year shine with a great transformation in building a strong and prosperous country!" "Let's continue the arduous march vigorously onward to paradise!"

14. Consider the function of the verb *to have* in the following context sentence.

I *had to* show the foreign participants the true face of our most wonderful and outstanding socialist fatherland, Korea, the land of *Juche*.

15. Explain the use of the auxiliary verb *did*.

- Not until I prompted the bystander with the term "beg" *did* he understand the import of the foreigner's question.
- Not until we went to see the splendor of Kwangbok Street firsthand *did* I have the impression he believed it was a street on which people actually lived rather than a film set.

16. Define the types of the conditional sentences.

- What would happen if he were to meet this finicky foreigner?
- If there had been no explanation that it was the earth, I would have concluded it was another planet. . . .
- "Won't you lose your job if an automated system can perform the work you used to do?"
- You're not satisfied unless you spoil a happy occasion with that kind of remark?"

A Farewell to Bad Habits

Before You Read

1. a. Give the explanation to the following context words and phrases:

e.g. a crucial query - an important issue that needs to be settled, discussed, or dealt with.

to belly-ache, closed door policy, amor patriae,
to point the accusing finger at, to blatantly insist,
unfettered freedom, to foment people

b. Use 5 of the above phrases in the sentences.

e.g. This brings us to the crucial query of government funding.

2. Read the context sentences and suggest prepositions to fill in the gaps.
Check yourselves after reading the article.

- No wonder then that we are so pleased about the government's recent decision to strike the rich with the real estate "tax bomb".
- In the 1970's my foreign friends in Seoul found it hard to understand why radical students who clashed the police on campus everyday volunteered to join the riot police as the easy option to do their compulsory military service.
- And they conjure provocative policies to foment people to quarrel and even to clash violently.
- Their tactics seem to be working nicely as it taps the collective unconscious circulating through our veins.
- In particular, have we not amazed the world our astonishing spectacular economic growth in such a short period of time?

3. Read the quotations and translate them into Ukrainian:

“I have often thought that Korea would be a far more admirable country if only we Koreans managed to get rid of five conspicuous bad habits that may well be inherent in our very makeup.”

“Meanwhile, our insidious politicians are busily working on our soft spots for their political gains.”

Read the following article written by Kim Seong-kon, a professor emeritus of English at Seoul National University, president of the Korean Association of Modern Fiction in English from 2004 to 2006 and the publisher of the quarterly

English literary journal, Korean Literature Now from 2012-2017. While reading point out what, according to Dr Kim, prevents South Korea to be one of the most admirable and appealing countries in the world.

A Farewell to Bad Habits
5 Bad Habits of Koreans
Kim Seong-kon

I have often thought that Korea would be a far more admirable country if only we Koreans managed to get rid of five conspicuous bad habits that may well be inherent in our very makeup.

First, we should learn not to be easily jealous and "belly-ache" but to applaud when others do well and succeed. For some reason, we do not readily tolerate those who are better than us and inevitably try to scuttle them. No wonder then that we are so pleased about the government's recent decision to strike at the rich with the real estate "tax bomb." And it is no surprise that we are so happy when our politicians, perhaps unwittingly, threaten to abolish first-rate universities.

Second, we should discard our deliberate tendency to be supercilious and also try to suppress our penchant to habitually disparage and dismiss others and, instead, be modest and endeavor to learn from them. We seem to be slow learners who are very reluctant to acknowledge the merits of others or embrace those that are different from us. This attitude eventually elicits the prejudiced "us" and "them" mentality and we know with historical hindsight that in part it led to the "closed door policy" in the last century that resulted in the tragic loss of our independence.

Third, we should not rush to blame others; instead, we should point the accusing finger at ourselves and, like an adult, assume full responsibility for our reactive knee-jerk behavior. Blaming others is far from being decent or acting brave or with maturity, and yet we constantly complain: "Because of America . . ." or "Because of Japan . . ." Instead, we should admit that it is primarily our fault. We also frequently find fault thus: "Because of the rich and the privileged, we are poor and deprived." But is this true? We must seriously ponder the validity of such false, even infantile, assumptions.

Fourth, we should learn to be more consistent at all times. Perceptive foreigners often point out that Koreans tend to lack consistency. In the 1970's my foreign friends in Seoul found it hard to understand why radical students who clashed with the police on campus everyday volunteered to join the riot police as the easy option to do their compulsory military service. For the comfort and convenience of being stationed in a city and spending weekends at home, they gladly paid the price; armed in full riot gear they crushed their former comrades with pepper gas and clubs.

Alas, little has changed today. Recently, I saw a notorious anti-American student activist unabashedly volunteered for the KATUSA (Korean Augmentation Troops to the U.S. Army)! Obviously he must have chosen a more comfortable military life and compromised with impunity his supposed radical political beliefs. With apparent insouciance he did not seem to suffer from his act of betrayal at all. Likewise, quite a few anti-American scholars in Korea still proudly flash their U.S. degrees on the jacket of their anti-American books. Even worse perhaps, those who blatantly insist that we stop learning English because we have been the slaves of the U.S. imperialism since 1945 are secretly sending their children to English-speaking countries including America.

Lastly, we should not rely too much on emotion or national sentiment and try to be more rational instead. Passion and self-interest are often threats to the very freedoms that have developed with our ultra-rapid modernization. Need it be stressed: We patently do not yet have - nor should we have - unfettered freedom in Korea, for are not most of us still seduced by the thundering roar of the passionate crowd indulging in blatant Korean ethnocentrism and unrestrained amor patriae?

Meanwhile, our insidious politicians are busily working on our soft spots for their political gains. They deliberately incite the rich and the poor, the young and the old, radicals and conservatives to antagonize each other. And they conjure up provocative policies to foment people to quarrel and even to clash violently. Their tactics seem to be working nicely as it taps into the collective unconscious circulating through our veins.

Of course, Koreans have numerous merits and striking abilities. In many ways we have every reason to be proud of ourselves. In particular, have we not amazed the world with our astonishing spectacular economic growth in such a short period of time? But if only we could eliminate the undesirable habits enumerated above Korea would surely be a much more appealing country that peoples all around the world would be more inclined to admire and esteem.

Available at http://www.tomcoyner.com/a_farewell_to_bad_habits.htm

After You Read

1. Enumerate those “bad habits of Koreans” emphasized by Dr Kim Seong-kon. How similar are they to those, which our modern Ukrainian society is suffering from nowadays?

2. a) Comment on the use of the definite article in the following context sentence: *They deliberately incite **the** rich and **the** poor, **the** young and **the** old, radicals and conservatives to antagonize each other.*

b) Define the type of the following context sentence: *But if only we could eliminate the undesirable habits enumerated above Korea would surely be a*

much more appealing country that peoples all around the world would be more inclined to admire and esteem. Dwell on the use of the noun *peoples* in terms of the category of number.

3. Express your opinion, answering the following questions:

- Is self-criticism a good trait?
- Are you prone to self-criticism?
- What are your personal traits that can prevent you from succeeding in life?

Yang Kwija: A Distant and Beautiful Place

Before you read

Read about the author of the story and reviews on her story.

Yang Kwija: Biography



Yang Kwija was the recipient of the Yi Sang Literature Prize, one of Korea's highest fiction awards, in 1992. She has achieved both critical and commercial success with novels that examine the persistence of traditional gender roles in Korean society and the alienation of modern Korean women. She is represented in English by *A Distant and Beautiful Place* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), a novel about the emerging middle class in the satellite cities of Seoul in the 1980s; and "Rust," *Korea Journal* 26, no.9. Another novel, *Contradictions*, is forthcoming from the Cornell University East Asia Series.

Available at http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~korea/jp/031112_fictionreading.html

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Review by Jerry Winzig

The jacket cover to this collection of Yang Kwija's stories describes it as "compassionate and often humorous stories that depict the Korean people's unflinching optimism and love of life." In reality, her stories about the Wonmi-dong neighborhood in the satellite city of Puch'on west of Seoul are often haunting, melancholy, and even disturbing.

The stories take place in the 1980s, during South Korea's rapid drive toward industrialization and economic development,, but the stories vividly capture the difficult circumstances of individuals who face cultural challenges and personal limitations as well as changing economic circumstances. In addition, while the book is a collection of stories, they are all about the same Wonmi-dong neighborhood in the shadow of Wonmi Mountain, and the same people are woven through most of the stories.

...

The opening story, "A Distant and Beautiful Place," describes the circumstances of the family of a young girl name Unhye as they prepare to move to Wonmi-dong. As the father, the mover, and the mover's assistant struggle with one of

the family's prize possessions, a large wooden wardrobe, we learn about how the family has already moved several times, each time to smaller quarters, and is now resorting to the extreme measure of moving outside of Seoul's city limits. The cold weather, Unhye's tears, the grandmother's nagging, and the long drive ridding in the back of the moving truck all combine for a mesmerizing story of people wandering in the midst of a large city.

...

The introduction says Kwija's writing "explores the modern urban experience in a changing society." I think the stories do much more than that. Certainly they capture the circumstances and personalities of individuals caught up in the urban experience in Seoul and its surrounding "satellite cities." More than that, however, Kwija's vivid imagery brings these people to life, and at the end of the book you will find you can't stop thinking about Mr. Om and Madam Hong, the tearoom woman, about Mr. Chu and Mr. Pak, two shopkeepers in Wonmi-dong, about Kyongju's mother and Yunhui, two single mothers who visit the zoo with their daughters, and about Unhye and her family. You will find them to be real people who live in a place that is really not so distant and at the same time is not always so beautiful.

Available at http://www.winzigconsultingservices.com/files/samples/kq/Yang_Kwija.html

Review by Stephen Epstein (abridged)

As Kim So-young and Julie Pickering note in their helpful introduction to *A Distant And Beautiful Place*, Yang Kwi-ja has numbered among South Korea's most successful authors since her debut in the late 1970s. Despite several literary prizes and best-sellers to her credit, however, little of her work has thus far been rendered into English. The appearance of the volume under review, a translation of Yang's 1987 short story collection *Wŏnmidong saramdŭl* (The people of Wŏnmi-dong), aids in filling this lacuna, and Yang now joins Hwang Sun-wŏn, Yun Hŭng-gil, Pak Wan-sŏ and Yi Ch'ŏng-jun in a select group of Korean writers who have anthologies exclusively dedicated to their short fiction available in English.

Like Cho Se-hŭi's groundbreaking *Nanjangiga ssoa ollin chagŭn gong* (A small ball launched by a dwarf), *Wŏnmidong saramdŭl* is a compilation of loosely inter-connected short stories that exemplify the traumas brought about by South Korea's headlong plunge into modernization, industrialization and urbanization. In a series of pieces initially published in literary journals between 1985 and 1987 and subsequently collected into an enormously popular single volume, Yang depicts the lives of the residents of Wŏnmi-dong, a district in Puch'ŏn, one of the satellite cities of Seoul that developed rapidly during the 1980s. Drawing on her own experience as a resident of the neighborhood for these imaginative tales, Yang portrays the effects of radical social change with sympathy, irony and poignant flashes of humor.

The title of the English version, *A Distant and Beautiful Place*, rests upon an astute decision to apply a translation of the first story's title, *Mŏlgo arŭmdaun tongne*, to the whole anthology. Not only is *A Distant and Beautiful Place* more evocatively resonant in English than a literal rendering of the original Korean title, the phrase draws etymological attention to the Chinese characters that compose the name Wŏnmi-dong (*wŏn*, "far"; *mi*, "beautiful"). The transference to their native Korean equivalents in *Mŏlgo arŭmdaun tongne* (*mŏlda*, "far"; *arŭmdapda*, "beautiful") brings out the productive dissonance in having Wŏnmi-dong as the stories' setting and encourages the reader to reflect upon the multiple ironies involved. Wŏnmi-dong, psychologically distant from Seoul, yet a mere subway ride away, becomes a site that offers a melancholy beauty of its own: here urban sprawl collides with a tranquil agrarian past; here hopes go hand in hand with disillusion, and the invocation of dreams inevitably conjures up their failure. The title also underscores the central role of the neighborhood itself; while several characters reappear throughout the stories, the overall protagonist of the collection is clearly Wŏnmi-dong. And although each tale is firmly rooted in a sense of place, firm localization does not mean stability. Despite the constant presence of Wŏnmi-san, the mountain that looms above, Yang notes repeatedly the changing face of this suburban landscape, as fields are whittled away to make room for housing and retail developments, and new stores replace others that fail.

The title story depicts the move of a family, a thinly disguised version of the author's own, from Seoul to Puch'ŏn. Driven from the capital proper by the rapid escalation of real estate prices, they depart for a small apartment on its outskirts. And although the apartment is the first dwelling they purchase instead of merely renting, this ostensible move upward is accompanied by dread that aspirations for a better life will be shattered. Yang depicts the move from the perspective of the husband, whose first impression of Puch'ŏn is paradigmatic: "The city looked brand-new one moment, as if it was starting out fresh; then the next instant it seemed old, as if it was already feeble and broken" (17). Wŏnmi-dong thus becomes a metaphor for the unfulfilled promises and evanescent benefits of Korea's economic miracle, as class relations are simply remapped in a reconstituted relationship between center and periphery. The protagonist feels that "Seoul had shoved them aside. It had gathered all its forces to drive them out only to bid them a treacherous farewell" (24).

A Distant and Beautiful Place marks Yang Kwi-ja clearly as an author of great talent. Deft descriptive touches, a knack for well-chosen images, and an abiding concern with narrative structure are matched by insightful exploration of issues of real social importance. In the afterword to her recent bestseller *Mosun* (Contradictions), Yang notes that in writing a novel, she finds it difficult to maintain the complete concentration she can devote to her short stories. *A Distant and Beautiful Place*, however, benefits both from the careful crafting of each piece as a self-standing entity and the depth allowed by carrying over narrative threads and themes from one story to the next. The collection stands

as an important literary document of Korea in the '80s, and these stories would make valuable additions to courses on Korean literature in translation or contemporary Korean society.

Available at <http://koreaweb.ws/ks/ksr/ksr06-02.htm>

While reading the story pay attention to the characters' feelings, emotions and attitudes towards the move.

A Distant and Beautiful Place *Yang Kwi-Ja*

As they squeezed the wardrobe out the narrow door, a fragment the size of a coin chipped off the side. The same thing had happened when they moved in. Gasping under the weight of his end, Ŭnhye's father had no time to examine this new blemish. He could only imagine the inner layers of wood gleaming like ivory and the angry scab that would eclipse the older scars on the rough surface. The ten-foot-long wardrobe was already scratched in several places. It couldn't be helped. After the initial annoyance passed, the scratch would establish itself as yet another mark of time. Because of the weight shifting forward and his own plodding gait, he soon forgot the scratch. The wardrobe resembled a huge coffin as it slowly emerged lengthwise through the cramped doorway. "Shift it to the left now, to the left!" the mover directed, the words straining to escape his clenched lips. Ŭnhye's father summoned all his strength and leaned slightly to the left. Only then did he see the mover's red face, veins bulging, on the other side of the door. A feeling came into his right wrist, like a spasm from bearing the weight in one position for so long. The fear that he might lose his precarious grip at any moment made him tense. *How much more energy do I have to put in before we get the rest of this thing out the door without another scratch?* He squeezed his eyes shut, despairing that the effort would require his last bit of strength. A pained cry, more agonizing than any groan, was about to burst from his throat. "Slowly now, pull it back slowly. No, no, back!" The mover sounded as though he was gritting his teeth. Ŭnhye's father was gritting *his* teeth. "Back now, to the left." It was only a matter of time before his right hand gave out. Cold sweat dripped down his back as he felt himself losing his grip. *I can't . . . I can't hold it any longer*, he was about to cry to the dirty cotton gloves on the other end of the wardrobe when at last the mover set his end down on the hallway floor, and the weight suddenly lessened. They had made it into the hall. The mover leaned out the door and shouted. "Hey, Chang! Get in here! I need some help with the wardrobe. The owner's not up to it." After carrying the wardrobe down the steep flight of thirty stone steps that led from the house, the mover and the driver leaned against the truck, smoking. Carrying the wardrobe down those steps was enough to exhaust anyone. At the bottom was an empty lot, just large enough for a truck to turn around. The sight of his family's shabby belongings piled in the open saddened Ŭnhye's father. Not that they hadn't always been shabby. He tried to ignore the props of their poor existence poking from the small bundles

and fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette. The wind was fierce and the cigarette was difficult to light. It was a smarting cold, harder and sharper than a knife blade. The cold wave that accompanied the winter kimchi season each year had started blowing a few days earlier. *Temperatures will drop to ten below zero, the coldest of the year.* Last night's weather report had been right: It was going to be the coldest day of the year. His mother must have noticed the new chip on the wardrobe as she passed with several light bundles. *Tsk, tsk.* He could hear her cluck in disapproval from where he stood in the yard. The sound was so penetrating that he tossed his cigarette to the ground and crushed it with his foot before he had smoked even half of it. For some reason, the sound of the clucking old woman, weighed down by her layers of clothing and with a muffler wrapped around her head, sent a chill down his spine. *Maybe it's the cold,* he thought. Maybe that's why he felt that chill as the wind blew up over their little bundles in the vacant lot. There was no one to help them move, no one except his immediate family—his wife, his mother, and his young daughter—the mover, and the driver. It was the suddenness of the move, he tried to persuade himself, and it was a weekday. Still, he wouldn't have asked anyone to help even if it was a weekend and they had planned well in advance. They had moved too often for that. They had been at this house less than two months. *What? You're moving again?* Director Cho, the head of his division, scowled quite in spite of himself. Ūnhye's father shouldn't have cited the move as his reason for missing work that day. But what could he say? Just two months earlier he had stood at Cho's desk offering the same excuse for his absence the next day. He should have known better. The same question had popped out of Cho's mouth last time. *Moving again? How come you move so often?* Director Cho had this habit of asking one question after another. *Why can't you? Have you forgotten that work begins at eight? Don't you know what we do here in the sales division? Don't you realize what day this is?* He never knew how to respond, and when he did, Cho always came back with another question. *Oh, and why is that?* There was no way around Cho's impossible queries. All he could do was push on, threading his way through the ridiculous riddles in silence. Hardly daring to breathe. His breathing—maybe it wasn't even his own anymore. Like everyone else in the world, he was bound by the tenacious ties of this complex thing called family. The fatigue he felt after a day at his desk in that office, where even the air was heavy, was the same fatigue one might feel after a duel for one's life. There was no need to explain why he couldn't give up the duels he fought six days a week. After all, everyone has their own bloody battles to fight. Come to think of it, it was only natural that Cho should scowl. According to Pak Ch'ansōng, who sat at the next desk, there was no need to take a day off work every time he moved. Leave household matters to the wife and take life easy, he advised. All Pak needed on moving day were the address and location of the new house. He even described the rare feeling he had when he entered an unfamiliar neighborhood in search of the new house where his family waited. "And if that doesn't work, you could move on Sunday and lend the wife a hand." A Sunday move was the obvious compromise, but it was out of the question. His mother would never agree to move on the Sabbath. There

was no crossing her belief that Sundays should be devoted to the Lord. She had been a Sunday school teacher for many years now. "They wouldn't fire you for taking a day off to move, would they? But the Lord, he'd drive you away if you moved on the Sabbath. What choice do we have? You know which is more fearful!" Having rested long enough to smoke a cigarette, the mover began toting the larger bundles down from the house. It didn't look as if there was much left. His wife was with their daughter, collecting things in the kitchen. The child leaned against her mother's back, rubbing her eyes and whimpering. "Look at Ûnhye," his wife called. "She wants me to carry her on my back!" *The poor kid must be sleepy*, he thought. She had been up since dawn because of the move. His wife pushed back her own unkempt hair and tried to comfort the child. Her nose was red, and she held one hand to her lower back, as if to support her enormous belly. Her frozen hands were swollen after several days of hard work. The mover, who had been traipsing in and out of the house in his winter boots, now picked up the rice chest in the front of the kitchen and headed for the truck. Ûnhye continued to whimper, and her mother attempted to mollify her in a voice as brittle as straw. "What's wrong, Ûnhye? Mommy's busy, too. I'm going to spank you if you keep pestering me." Ûnhye's father looked in the bedroom, but everything that needed to go had now been taken. The room was empty except for some trash lying on the floor. Footsteps echoing, he stepped inside and glanced around. A few rusted nails and Ûnhye's scribbling were all that was left on the blank walls. The door to the attic was wide open, and long ribbons of dust marked the spot where the wardrobe had stood. They had only to sweep up now, and then his weary respite in this room would be over. It felt strange somehow, looking around the room he had occupied, the room he had returned to each night to lean against the wall and read the newspaper. And it felt strange confronting the few scraps of memories, the few remnants of the past. There on the wall was the tape measure made in boredom one Sunday. He had carefully marked off the inches and stuck it to the wall with Scotch tape. He had planned to record Ûnhye's growth but had marked off only a yard and ten inches because he hadn't expected to live there long enough for her to grow much past three feet. At first the child had wanted to be measured every five minutes. He recalled her solemn expression and the way she stood at attention, pressing her thin shoulders against the wall. She didn't seem to grow very quickly. Neither the marks of time nor the hatchmarks on the tape change if you keep watching them. But time clearly does pass. He looked at the carefully spaced marks once more. He could imagine the child's thin shoulders superimposed on the tape. Now all that remained on the barren walls was the tape, and it would leave only a tattered scar when it was torn down. A cold wind seeped down from the attic, and when he closed the door he discovered another remnant of the past. When was that? It had happened late one night when he had returned home drunk. He remembered the occasion clearly because it had happened quite recently. There had been a get-together of the old-timers in the sales division, a kind of pep rally. According to Pak Ch'ansông, the oldsters, now entering their thirties, were being pushed aside by the younger generation, and the group had consumed an assortment of drinks on the pretext

that they should unite to protect themselves. He didn't remember how they had decided to gain supremacy over the newcomers. In any case, he had arrived home well after midnight, collapsed into bed, and fallen asleep. In the middle of the night, he woke with a terrible thirst. The curtains were drawn and the room was pitch dark. *I need some water*, he thought, fumbling through the dark toward the door. But for some mysterious reason, the door wouldn't open. And the doorknob felt strange. Instead of a round knob with a button in the middle, a long thin handle wiggled in his hand, then fell off altogether. Thirsty and convinced the door wouldn't open, he brought his fist down on the wood with all his might. The thin plywood door, good for decoration and nothing else, gave in with a thud, and his wife jerked awake. "Why are you trying to open the attic door?" He ran his hand over the cracked door and touched the broken handle. There was a simple explanation for his scuffle with the attic door: In the house they had lived in before, the door to the kitchen had been on that side. Wherever they went, it was always several days before he was startled out of the habits of one house and came to grips with having moved again. Now he remembered—he was the one who, when Ûnhye started crawling up the stairs, had installed the hook on the attic door. The door that wouldn't open. The thirst and raging impatience. He turned away, fuzzily recalling a shadow breaking off the handle and smashing its fist into a door that wouldn't open. But now the sound of Ûnhye sobbing shook the empty house. Her mother must have finally given her a swat. "What are you doing to that child? We can't have no crying on an important day like this!" His mother lifted Ûnhye onto her back and stood at the threshold of the main room. "Mighty cold, ain't it, Ûnhye? Yes, but I'm feeling good. Finally bought our own house, after all that wandering." The child screwed up her lips, trying to control the distress that welled within her. Streaked with tears and snot from a lingering cold, Ûnhye's face was blue from the chill wind, but her grandmother kept repeating how good she felt, though she, too, looked haggard. "Thank you, Father. Thank you for giving us a house to live in." He recalled his mother's prayer earlier today at the breakfast table. "Thank you for helping us on our way. Lord, you promised Abraham generations of prosperity and bestowed a wonderful land on him. This family has suffered great hardships with no house to call its own, but now, thanks to your blessings, Father, we, too, are leaving for Canaan. Lord, who has given us a fine house, please watch over us in our new home and help us live in accordance with your ways . . ." Her prayers were always so articulate. As she often said, it was only natural after more than forty years of believing in the Lord. But this morning's prayer was particularly eloquent. Her strong accent disappeared without a trace, though the rough intonation remained as she prayed for nearly ten minutes. This was the second time she had spoken of the land of Canaan in her prayers. An eighteen-*p'yông* apartment in Puch'ôn was Canaan to her. For him, it was the first house he could call his own in four years of marriage, but for Mother, it was the first since Father's death. In fact, it was her first house in twenty years. "So how are we going to do this? Are you two going to go ahead in a taxi?" she asked. The cab of the moving truck had room for only two more people. "It would cost too much to

take a taxi all the way to Puch'ôn," his wife replied. "We'll ride in the back of the truck. That way we can give the driver directions." After scraping together the money for their new house, his wife wasn't going to squander on a taxi. "Go get a blanket. We won't get cold if we wrap up," she said as she waddled into the kitchen again. "Will that be enough?" his mother asked. "You in the family way and all? Maybe I should ride in back." He couldn't let his mother ride in the truck bed. And he could hardly ask the mover to sit back there. People who earn a living by the sweat of their brow can get nasty when they think they are being treated unfairly. Besides, it was a long ride. He suddenly realized he was no longer a citizen of Seoul. He didn't even know how long it would take to get to Puch'ôn by anything but the subway. He was used to moving in circles around Seoul, from Miari to Hwagok-dong, from Hwagok-dong to Ssangmun-dong, but this move, across the boundary to Kyônggi Province, was downright foreign to him. *We'd better hurry*, he thought. *We may own a home now, but Puch'ôn is completely new territory.* He reached down with both hands to sweep the trash into a pile. That's when he kicked something. It flew through the air, banged off the wall next to the kitchen, and tumbled to the floor with a crash. Its red back and four rotating feet startled him. Leaning over, he picked it up cautiously. It was a seal, a crude plastic toy he had bought for a pittance from a street vendor at the subway entrance last summer on his way home from work. Wind it up by the spring in its abdomen, and its feet paddled furiously. The seal had spent the entire summer paddling around a tub of water; now its unsightly red back was peeling and faded. His wife must have thrown it out. Except for the rattle it now made because the seam connecting the back and abdomen had come loose when it hit the wall, the seal still worked. It didn't matter whether he threw it away or kept it, so he slipped it into his jacket pocket. He could always throw it away later, so there was no harm in keeping it a little longer. His mother was down below on the street with Ûnhye on her back. Every time the driver lifted a bundle onto the truck she warned him to be careful of the breakables inside. Ûnhye lay flat against her grandmother's back. The cutting wind blowing from the top of the hill hit her square in the face. The weather was ominous; it might even snow. The mover rushed past with a large wooden tub filled with the last pots and pans from the kitchen. "That's it," he called out, not bothering to look back. "Let's get out of here before we freeze to death." "He's right," Ûnhye's mom murmured as she leaned against the hallway door to catch her breath. "I'm freezing. Let's go." From the bedroom to the hall he wandered, and from the hall to the yard. Then suddenly he realized something. He had finally bought his own home and was headed for Canaan, the land of milk and honey, just as his mother had said. So why was he feeling so lost? Well, even Abraham would have been daunted at the thought of moving all the way to Puch'ôn with a pregnant wife on the verge of giving birth, a mother nearly seventy years old, and a whimpering daughter. The movers began throwing ropes across the truckload of bundles. At his wife's insistence, they had left a space for the two of them beneath the window at the back of the cab. "It'll be hard to keep the furniture in place if you sit there." The driver was reluctant, but Ûnhye's mother won in the end. "You know, we could

get stopped for this,” the driver added. The driver was nicer than the other man, though. The mover glared at the pregnant woman as she crawled in among the bundles. “I guess it won’t be as cold in there as at the very back,” the man snarled. Ûnhye’s mother pretended not to hear and began spreading the blanket and pieces of clothing in the narrow space left in the bed of the truck. The cab and the sections of the wardrobe to the left and right would block the wind. His mother climbed into the passenger’s seat with the sleeping child wrapped in her sweater. “Go up and see if we’ve left anything behind,” she said. “Can’t come back for anything once we’re gone. Go have one last look.” “Pull! Pull it tighter! Good! You got it?” The air was thick with steam pouring from the men’s mouths. He dashed up the stairs, his own breath puffing in clouds. He didn’t expect to find anything; he was simply taking another look because his mother had asked. All that remained was a blunt coal pike in the storage room where they kept the *yônt’an* briquettes used for heating and cooking. There was nothing worth taking. As he turned to go, he noticed a note wedged in the door of the back apartment where a young working couple lived. *I’ve taken the grill you borrowed. Ûnhye’s mom.* His heart warmed at the small, precise writing. If she had gone to the trouble of retrieving possessions from other people’s kitchens, nothing had been left behind. He headed down the stairs, slowly this time. His wife, wedged amid the furniture now bound in a tangle of ropes, waved at him to hurry. A long drive ahead of them, the two movers stood with their backs to the truck, relieving themselves. Now the only thing left to do was depart. When he reached the bottom step, he turned. The front gate, with its peeling watermelon–green paint, swung in the wind. All morning, not a soul had looked out from the scattering of large Western–style houses nearby, and now, with only a glance, he bade farewell and jumped into the back of the truck. It was cozier among the bundles than he expected. As the truck headed down the hill, they had to brace themselves to keep from slipping, but after that, they had only to endure the vibrations of the rumbling truck. He pulled his wife’s thick coat up over her head, hoping to protect her goosebumped face from the wind. “Not yet . . . I can’t breathe.” She pulled the coat down and draped it over his knees instead. At first glance, they must have looked like just another bundle. And even if someone did look more closely, they would see only a shabby lump of humanity, nothing more. As the truck wove its way out of the city, they pulled the blanket up around their shoulders and huddled in silence. From time to time his wife shifted under the weight of her large belly. He wadded up some clothing and stuffed it behind her back so she could lean against the truck’s cab. The distant sound of a pop song filtered from the radio inside. The truck had to pause frequently for traffic lights, so eventually they decided to put on extra sweaters. Whenever the truck stopped, people in the cars behind them would notice them. His wife was practically lying down now, buried beneath the clothes and blanket; he covered his face with a sweater and pressed closer to the wardrobe. His wife remained silent, even when the truck stopped for long intervals. If she hadn’t stirred each time the truck jerked to a halt or accelerated abruptly, he might have wondered if she were still alive. Stretching his leg toward her, he felt her warmth, and she shifted once

more. A bundle of quilts bound by a rope wobbled on top of the desk, and somewhere dishes rattled incessantly. He shouldn't have moved them into that old house, knowing the owner had put it up for sale. He had never imagined anyone buying a house in the middle of winter, but that is just what happened, and so they had to pack up and move just days before the baby was due. He had been naive to believe the real estate agent. The house had been on the market for three years, the man said, and not a single person had come to look at it. It would never sell! The ugly old house was wedged between several luxurious mansions. What could anyone do with a tiny property at the top of a steep hill? What's more, the house was in such a terrible state of repair that no one would dare take it on. The owner had long since given up on selling and now planned to fix the house up and pass it on to his son, the agent explained. The rent was extremely low considering you had the main wing of the house—two bedrooms and a living room—and were removed from the other wings. And so he had signed the rental agreement, despite his misgivings. Winter was coming and they had no time to dawdle, what with the date they were scheduled to vacate their old house fast approaching. No prospective buyers, and yet scarcely two weeks after they moved in, wouldn't you know it—the house was sold. And by the very same realtor who had arranged for them to rent the place. The owner, the one who had said he was going to give the house to his son, signed the sales contract without a word to them, then demanded that they move out. The people in the lower wing could stay, but the buyer wanted the main wing for himself. And he wanted to move in before the year was out because he felt it was bad luck to move during the new year. They were in a difficult position, with the baby due at the end of the year. He might have stood his ground, had they moved in without knowing that the house was on the market, but such was not the case. And the owner had, after all, offered to pay their moving expenses. At first he couldn't accept what had happened; they had just started a new life, and the forced move was so abrupt. A dizzying array of strategies, which could hardly be called ingenious, flashed through his mind. He had nothing to offer as proof of their rights, however, just a few feeble facts: they had reported their new address to the district office only two days before; they had barely figured out the bus routes; they still hadn't unpacked all their things. There was no getting around it, though, so he decided to clear his head and accept the situation. The most sensible solution was to resign to reality as soon as possible. There was nothing more foolhardy than resisting with youthful bravado, he decided. And so they began another depressing round of real estate offices. "Oh, look! The Han River's almost frozen!" He hadn't noticed his wife's face poking out of the blanket, but now she was shaking him. The truck was crossing the Han. The wind from the river surged over him. The edges of the river were beginning to freeze. A paper-thin film of ice connected the dark green water and the thicker ice along the banks. They could see those migratory birds with the black backs—what were they called? Mallard ducks? The birds flapped their wings, preparing for flight. Several boats were frozen in the water near the banks. His wife craned her neck the entire span of the bridge, as if she had never seen the Han before. "Aren't you

cold?” “No. Well, just a little . . .” Once they had seen the frozen river, the cold seemed to intensify. *Just a little*, she had said, but he felt quite cold now. She slipped her hands under the blanket and began rubbing her icy feet. The cushions they had laid on the bed of the truck hadn’t warmed from their body heat, and the cold enveloping their legs threatened to chill them through. “Come closer.” He pulled her near and slipped his arm around her shoulders. “We still have a long way to go, don’t we? It’s already so cold. What are we going to do?” she asked in a small voice as she pulled the clothes around them. The covers slipped down each time the truck moved. *We still have a long way to go, don’t we?* Her question reminded him of that Saturday when the sleet had come down so hard. They had taken the subway from City Hall station to a place called Puch’ôn. They had never been there before. They had gone on the advice of his wife’s high-school classmate. The woman had made a tidy profit building a couple of houses there, and she said they could buy an apartment for the price of the key money on a few rooms in Seoul. They were already exhausted by the search for a house to rent, so they could hardly ignore her advice. He wouldn’t have been so worried if they could put off moving until Christmas, the deadline the new owner had given them, but the baby was due Christmas Day. They had to move at least ten days before the due date, just to be on the safe side. Each time he ducked out from work to go house-hunting with his wife, he worried that she might go into labor. His heart jumped whenever he got a call from home. They were desperate, but a suitable house simply didn’t present itself. They couldn’t find a place that fit both their budget and moving schedule. A decent house would turn out to be too expensive, and when the price was right, the house was unspeakably small and uncomfortable. On occasion, a house would seem just right, but invariably the date was wrong. His pregnant wife waddled around looking at houses, too. Every Saturday and Sunday the whole family had to go out on house-hunting expeditions to neighborhoods where rent was cheap. And then they heard about Puch’ôn. There was no reason to delay. Determined to sign a contract on the spot, he counted the days until the next Saturday when he and his wife boarded the Seoul-Inch’ôn subway, which ran through Puch’ôn. It was a cold, wet day in early December. He wouldn’t forget their first trip to Puch’ôn for a long time. His wife trailing after him, gasping under the weight of her belly . . . the watery beef soup they had in an alley somewhere as they wandered through the unfamiliar neighborhoods. The roads were difficult to navigate, and the unpaved side streets were muddy from the sleet. It was winter, but construction was in full swing in some places, and the neighborhood around the subway station was dotted with empty lots piled high with spent *yônt’an* ash. Every house and shop had the same face, but they didn’t look the least bit cheerful or friendly; rather, they all emitted an air of indifferent laxity. The city looked brand-new one moment, as if it was starting out fresh; then the next instant it seemed old, as if it was already feeble and broken. Wandering the streets of the unfamiliar city, where new beginnings coexisted with decay, they shivered, lips blue, in winter’s first cold spell. After snooping around a collection of squat apartment houses painted loud colors, they finally signed a contract. A sales contract, not another rental agreement with a

key money deposit. It was an eighteen-*p'yông* apartment on the second floor, about four bus stops from the subway station. All they had to do was add 3.5 million won to the key money they already had. Two million was from a long-term bank loan that the previous owner hadn't paid off. And they could cover the rest if they closed their savings account and sold off their wedding jewelry. Best of all, the moving date was soon. He was encouraged by his wife's calculations: They would have time to unpack, lay in a winter supply of kimchi, albeit a bit late, and still have a week to recover before the baby was due. The apartment had three rooms, including a space that could be called a living room, and a *yônt'an* boiler that supplied hot water as well as heat. His wife beamed as she toured the apartment. "It's like a dream! Look at this! Remember Hyôni's house over in Chôngnûng? It's eighteen *p'yông*, but it goes for more than thirty million won! No, it must go for over forty million now! Oh, come look at this! The bathtub's made out of marble! It's so elegant!" The truck stopped at the rotary in Yôngdûngp'o. Vehicles lined the roads in all directions, waiting for the light to change. *Time for a smoke*, he thought, digging slowly through his pockets. "Where are we?" his wife asked. Only her eyes were visible. "Yôngdûngp'o. I think we're halfway there. Cold, aren't you?" "Yes, a little." She started rubbing her feet again. He tucked the blanket around her shoulders, then stretched his legs cautiously and tried to stand. The front and sides of the truck bed were blocked, leaving only the rear open to view. There was nothing behind them but a long line of taxis waiting for customers. He wanted to smoke, but unfortunately, his cigarettes were in his pants pocket. He retrieved them and was about to sit down when he realized his matches were in his pants pocket, too. As he rose a second time, his eyes met his mother's through the glass partition at the back of the truck cab. *Cold, eh?* That was what she seemed to be saying. He shook his head as he watched her wrinkled lips open and close. *Ūnhye* must have awakened; her head popped over the back of the seat. *Daddy!* she seemed to say. He tried to smile, but he felt as if his lips were cracking. The child's small hand tapped on the glass. Then another face suddenly appeared beside hers: the driver. He gestured downward with his hand. *Wants me to sit down, I guess.* Like an obedient student, he quickly crawled back among the covers. The light changed and the truck leaped forward with a violent cough. The wind, which had subsided momentarily, began to whip around them once more. He postponed the cigarette and shoved his hands into his jacket pockets to thaw, but something blocked his way. *What's this?* he wondered, pulling out the faded red seal. Annoyed that he was still carrying the silly toy around in his pocket, he squeezed the seal until it creaked. The seal reminded him of the office. "You know that Director Cho? In Yôngdong there are probably a dozen bar girls that he calls mistress. The man worships women. He's always saying stuff like, 'Do you realize what day this is?' He picked it up from those girls. Didn't you know? Women have a patent on expressions like that. First step to becoming a nag. Basic technique for getting on someone's nerves." Pak Ch'ansông loved analyzing and deciphering Director Cho. ... Director Cho had a subtle way of getting on people's nerves—jerking them around, piling on work without them realizing it, then sneaking off,

pretending he was fed up with it all, only to return at the last minute to take credit for the finished product. Still, they tolerated him. A man in his position needed a few faults. *Director Cho's no better off than any of us*, he sometimes thought. Except for a little more pay, a few more years under his belt, and a slightly higher position in the firm, he wasn't any different from the rest of them. He went around in the same endless circles with nothing particular to brag about, except perhaps that nickname. "Directors are nothing special. They get together and complain about their superiors and whine about their expense accounts, just like us. ... Everyone glared daggers at their superiors: the staff at Cho, Cho at the executive director, and the executive director at the president of the firm. Those living in a perfect world, where there was no need to glare, would never understand the simple pleasure hidden in that look. He sat the seal on his knee and gazed at it as he smoked a cigarette. The truck was racing along a road lined with ash-gray cement buildings. Black smoke belched from a towering chimney. The truck had picked up considerable speed compared to its hesitant progress earlier in the journey, and the wind blew harder as a result. He shuddered and took a long draw on the cigarette, tapping the ash off with quivering fingers. The wind swept away the ash, and he bounced along with the vibrations of the wheels. Factories appeared as dark gray bodies, blackened by the smog. It looked like they had passed through Kuro and were heading for Kaebong-dong. They seemed to have traveled so far, yet Seoul showed no sign of ending. Even the concrete walls of the factories seemed to stretch on forever. He thought of the people working inside. He imagined another Director Cho who would serve as fodder for the workers' complaints. Recalling the families who depended on those workers, he looked at his wife. Once again she had wedged herself inside the blankets and clothes, so even her face was buried. *Cold always brings sleep. But it's dangerous to sleep in the cold*, he thought, reaching over to wake her. Then he stopped. The rise and fall of her round belly were clearly visible through the layers of clothing. He could only hope that she was dreaming of their new house with its elegant marble bathtub. He took another long draw on his cigarette, melancholy at the thought of moving, with his aging mother and young daughter in the truck cab and his pregnant wife in the back with the furniture. He lifted his arm to discard the cigarette, which had burned down to the filter now. *Is this still Seoul?* Gazing at the buses weaving busily through the traffic, he marveled at the city's enormity. He didn't want to dwell on the fact that he couldn't find a place for himself within the boundaries of the huge metropolis. He had begun this roaming from one rented room to another years ago, back when a key money rental agreement lasted only six months. His mother had left his sister's place down south during his last year in college and had come to Seoul to cook and clean for him in his rented room. It was after he got married and needed more living space that he began to feel that his life was a desperate struggle just to find a place with two bedrooms and a small living room. Sometimes the rooms drove them into the streets, and other times they abandoned the rooms for another place. In most cases, it was the rooms that sent them packing. After those countless moves, he had come to one conclusion: There was no hope without

your own house. Hope, especially for those living in Seoul, meant a house. Now he was leaving Seoul to fulfill that hope. He couldn't shake off the feeling that something wasn't quite right. After all his years in that enormous city, he had never owned a house. That was the same as saying he had lived without hope. But now he had bought a house. The only difference was, it was in Puch'ôn, not Seoul. So in this case, was the house synonymous with hope? He hadn't found an answer. *No*, he told himself repeatedly, *I'm not being driven from Seoul*. Crouched in the bed of the moving truck, watching his wife shiver in the cold, he heaved a low sigh. He felt so depressed now that he couldn't believe he had been so excited about the sales contract, pouring over it again and again. He was already nothing; he was insignificant. His mother's pitiful suggestion that he was Abraham, leading his clan across the plains to Canaan, was nothing more than a defense against a sad premonition. Abraham? He would never be Abraham. Because he couldn't escape his mother, house, daughter, or wife. Monthly installments at the bank, overdue payments, his pathetic salary and bonus, all the little debts to be paid off, the electronic toys his daughter begged for. *No*, he couldn't imagine leaving Seoul like Abraham, not with those chains jangling around his ankles. How many years had he been living this life? The kind of life where you wake up asking, "What day is it?" As the nineteenth of each month passed like all the nineteenths before it, he longed only for some other day. Today the nineteenth and tomorrow the twentieth—he knew all too well what those days entailed. There had been so many mornings when he had awakened knowing it was the twentieth or the eighth—it didn't matter—he just wished it was another day. Only when he realized that today was that faraway day that had always eluded his grasp did he come to his senses and get up to shave. But hope was everywhere. It just wasn't for him. There was one solace, though. When the nineteenth passed, a Sunday would sometimes follow and bonus day would soon draw near. There was no harm in considering the threat of falling if he could hope for something different and go after it on the off chance that he might succeed. From Oryu-dong, the truck spent more time standing still than it did moving. The narrow two-lane highway couldn't accommodate the endless stream of traffic. When the tires' vibrations stopped, his wife woke from her fitful sleep, turned, and rolled herself into a tighter ball. And each time he pulled up her covers, he looked away for fear he might encounter her swollen face. Piled at her feet were several *ramen* boxes bound with green nylon twine tied in the shape of a cross. Fragile. Dishes. The warnings were scrawled in red crayon. Some boxes bore special warnings, complete with exclamation marks: Extra Fragile. Glass! On their first few moves, his wife was near tears at the sight of the inevitable breakage; she had cried when two of the crystal glasses she had splurged on when they got married were broken. Since then, however, she had mastered the art of moving and now marked each bundle with its own special warning. Still, each time she found a new scratch on the wardrobe or dressing table she was upset and nearly shrieked in horror. There was no end to the stories about that wardrobe. When he married her, he was immediately obliged to find a place for the tenfoot-long wardrobe she had brought with her, but it simply wouldn't fit through the

door. The shabby rented room was the problem. It had no real door with one of those push-button locks, just a flimsy plywood thing only slightly larger than a trapdoor. They tried tipping the wardrobe on its side, they tried standing it on end, but nothing worked. The room didn't even have a window. For several years he had worked hard to save money for a house, but the rent on two rooms was still more than he could afford after paying off the wedding expenses. He had no choice but to leave his new bride's wardrobe in the landlord's hallway. In their next house, they couldn't fit the whole wardrobe in one room; they put the larger section and one of the small sections in one room and the other in his mother's room. During that move, the wardrobe, still new for all intents and purposes, got a long, thick scratch across the front. Each time they moved, the cumbersome wardrobe brought nothing but complaints from annoyed movers. And wherever they went, the room turned into a long, cramped box as soon as the wardrobe was brought in. "Well, we can't let a wardrobe rule our lives," his wife said finally. Then she, too, began to scowl at the wardrobe that had been beyond her means in the first place. Still, it was thanks to her devotion that the wardrobe was in such good shape. When she found out about this morning's damage, she was sure to let out another scream. But who knows? Maybe she had seen it already. Maybe she was too exhausted to let a chip off a wardrobe bother her. He looked at her. She was awake because of the frequent stops. And she probably couldn't sleep anymore because of the cold. It hurt to see her huddled form. "Where are we?" she asked in a thin voice from the depths of her blankets. At first it sounded like a moan, and he was startled. For a brief instant, before he heard her repeat the words, all manner of catastrophes ran through his mind. The most alarming was the image of this woman—no, his wife—giving birth in the back of a moving truck. "We're almost there. Hang on just a little longer. It's cold, isn't it?" She stuck her mussed head out first, then struggled to sit up. The truck was slowly climbing a low hill toward the boundary where Seoul met the province. She seemed to shiver, then sneezed suddenly. "See! Sleep hunched up in the cold and you catch a chill." Lacking an alternative, he stared at her red nose. "You could trade places with Mother if you're too cold." She shook her head. "I'm all right. We're almost there . . ." Her weary voice was drowned in another sneeze. She gathered herself and leaned against the wardrobe. "Did you remind them to keep the boiler burning?" They had asked the real estate agent and his wife to keep the heat on in the new house, but now he felt anxious because he hadn't called to confirm this before they left. "The rooms are nice and big, so we'll have no trouble getting the wardrobe in . . ." He searched for words to console his wife, but all he could think of was the wardrobe. "That stupid wardrobe! Who cares where we put it," she snapped. Her indifference left him speechless. They had agonized so over the wardrobe in Seoul. Did she realize there was a difference between a Seoul wardrobe and a Puch'ôn wardrobe? Her hair tousled and her lips cracked by the wind, she smiled weakly. "Look! There's the statue of the guardian beast. That means it's not Seoul anymore." The truck had finally crossed the border into Kyônggi Province. With nothing more than the meaningless Good-bye! on the back of the stone border marker, Seoul was gone.

They watched in silence as the stone beast faded into the distance. A few moments later his wife murmured, almost as if she were reciting the refrain of a song. "It seems colder here. My feet are freezing." He reached under the blanket and fumbled for her feet. His hands felt as if they were touching ice, and he began to rub. As he thawed her icy feet, he looked into his wife's face. She in turn stared into her husband's haggard face. It seemed like her feet would never warm up, and the truck rattled on and on. "That's okay," she said, tucking her feet under her body. As he smoothed the blanket over her legs, the truck passed beneath a huge arch welcoming them to Puch'ôn, but the furniture blocked his view. Welcome was all he saw. Good-bye! and Welcome! The greetings made him feel lonely. Seoul had shoved them aside. It had gathered all its forces to drive them out, only to bid them a treacherous farewell. Loaded in the back of a speeding truck, they were greeted by Puch'ôn: "Welcome!" What tricks lay hidden behind that slick hello? He gazed at the passing landscape, shivering with apprehension, or was it just the cold? He was to blame when the truck driver got lost and they ended up in Sosa-dong. It was only at the entrance to Sosa-dong that he remembered the real estate agent telling him to find City Hall and drive straight down from there. The truck started up again and began following the signs to City Hall. "Sosa. Isn't that where Sosa peaches come from?" His wife seemed to have recovered, relieved, no doubt, that they were almost there. "The very mention of peaches reminds me of when I was pregnant with Ûnhye. Boy, did I eat a lot of peaches! I couldn't stand to eat anything else! Remember what you said? 'Looks like that baby's destined for a life of leisure in the Peach Blossom Paradise.' " He smiled bitterly. Why did she have to drag up that old story at a time like this? From Canaan to the Taoist Peach Blossom Paradise. At the end of a long journey in the back of a moving truck, she had managed to discover one more ray of hope. From City Hall, he had to give directions to the driver. As they passed the white building, imposing as all government structures are, the road narrowed abruptly and the truck driver was forced to blast his horn to alert passing pedestrians. After several minutes barreling down a quiet street lined with an awkward combination of indistinguishable spec houses and empty lots, he saw their new neighborhood unfold in the distance. Next to the residential area was an industrial complex, dark and gray, with soot pouring from its chimneys. On the hill that stretched the length of the neighbourhood like a silk-screen painting were a few sparse patches of snow, fading now under the dark sky like dust.

❖ At last the truck stopped, and he, his aging mother, young daughter, and pregnant wife finally became residents of that distant and beautiful place, Wonmi-dong. The owner of the Kangnam Real Estate Office was the first to stick his head out; then a handful of kids dashed out to surround the truck. The woman from the beauty salon paused from the permanent she was giving to open her door and look, as did the man leaving the wallpaper shop for another job. And from the third floor of the apartment house, a young man with sunken eyes watched them unload their belongings from the truck.

Translated by Kim So-joung and Julie Pickering

After You Read

Understanding the text: Analysis

1. Look at the following words and word combination from the text. Match the words to the left with their synonyms to the right. One word has more than one equivalent. Define the shades of meaning in each pair or group of synonyms.

to give smb a swat	mussed
unkempt	scar
misgiving	to pester
scab	premonition
to whimper	scratch
	to spank

2. Restore the collocations from the text. Translate them into Ukrainian.

Beginning	Ending	Restored collocation	Translation
rental	supply		
prospective	money		
cold	buyers		
winter	installments		
expense	one's teeth		
key	a sigh		
monthly	spell		
overdue	agreement		
to grit	haggard		
to look	payments		
to heave	accounts		

3. Define the meaning and types of the multy-word verbs:

**to chip off, to wind smth up, to poke out,
to trail after smb, to shove smb aside,
to snoop around, to tousle, to scowl at**

Exploring Other Sources: Korean Manhwa



Available at <http://www.list.or.kr/images/PDS/4/17.jpg>

1. Read the information on the Korean manhwa and the translator's introduction to one of them. What art forms are Korean manhwas similar to in other countries? What are their peculiarities?

Manhwa: A Language of Unlimited Imaginations

Manhwa celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2009. This popular art form holds a long and cherished history that began with the first publication of Do-young Lee's political cartoons in "Daehan Minbo." This print newspaper was founded on June 2, 1909, and Manhwa was born along with it. Manhwa is an art form used to comment on a wide variety of topics. It can often spotlight societal injustices. Sometimes, Manhwa tells marvelous tales of dreamy romance. Other times, the art form simply uses its simplified figures and their exaggerated gestures to provide amusement and entertainment. To this day, Manhwa continues to evolve and hold a special place within the hearts and minds of Korean society.

We can examine the history of Manhwa by identifying unique traits within each distinct era and observe how the beloved authors of each generation interacted with the public. Following its birth, Manhwa had to endure Korea's tumultuous

history under Japanese colonial rule. Manhwa survived the time periods of national liberation, the dark years of the Korean War, and through the dismal military dictatorship. The 80's and 90's of the 20th century marked the renaissance of Manhwa. Manhwa published during these bygone eras help us reflect on our nation's past.

On the other hand, the new work from the year 2000 and onwards employs digital media technology. These works allow us to interpret present-day Korean comics in a new light and maybe even predict the industry's future.

Manhwa Bang

Bang is the Korean word for room. A manhwa bang is a social space where you can hang out with friends and read a wide variety of Korean Manhwa. The manhwa bang at the KCC has a wide range of manhwa in both Korean and English.

Available at <http://london.korean-culture.org/navigator.do?menuCode=200903170054&action=VIEW&seq=19797>

Reflections on the Manhwabang *(translator's introduction by Heinz Insu Fenkl)*

1. I grew up in South Korea in the 1960's during the Park Chung-hee years, back in the day when comic books, or *manhwa*, were classified as one of the great social evils along with alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling, and prostitution. I lived in a neighborhood in Korea's largest camp town, just outside the American Army base called ASCOM, so I witnessed the full range of these social evils, sometimes on a daily basis. But I was only a kid, and I generally avoided the other social evils by hanging out at the local *manhwabang*, the "comic book room," a neighborhood institution where all the young local delinquents—mostly teenage thugs and schoolboys playing hooky—could be found.



South Korea called itself a democracy in those days, though it was a tenuous one that technically became a military dictatorship the year my family left, 1972, when Park installed the Yushin Constitution and disbanded parliament. He had taken power through the May 16th "bloodless" coup in 1961 while student protests were destabilizing the interim administration after the downfall of Syngman Rhee.

In the 1960s, Korea was still recovering from the devastating civil war that had left the country split in two and forever separated nearly ten million families. The South saw the North as a nation of fanatical Reds ruled by a megalomaniacal dictator whose major ambition was to infiltrate assassin spies below the DMZ and destabilize the struggling, peace-loving, capitalist,

democratic counterpart. The atmosphere in the South was constantly tense, based on both a perceived and real threat. In the 1968 assassination attempt on Park, known as “The Blue House Raid,” thirty-one infiltrators came within sight of Park’s residence. The national manhunt that ensued after their botched mission resulted in the deaths of sixty-eight South Koreans and three Americans. In 1974, in another attempt, a North Korean assassin missed him and killed Park’s wife. Ironically, it was a member of Park’s own KCIA that finally assassinated him in 1979.

There was still a national curfew in the 1960s and 70s, a constant reminder of local military power and the military threat from the North. Live munitions were still to be found all over the country, left over from the war and from American exercises. Every season, the local elementary schools had educational campaigns: “Beware of Explosives!” or “How to Spot an Infiltrator!” along with the typical ones for “Fire Safety” and “Personal Hygiene.” Children were taught how to spot spies through their odd accents or cultural ignorance, and even visiting relatives from other parts of the country were sometimes reported to the local police.

I attended the U.S. Department of Defense school, so I missed much of this education and indoctrination. The American military school’s mission was diametrically opposite that of the Korean schools—since we were living in what was still an active combat zone (the Korean War having never officially ended), we were kept calm with familiar relics of “home” in America. But I saw all of my cousin’s pastel crayon posters for these campaigns, which also emphasized other services to the nation. I would play hooky and follow her entire school into the hills to pick caterpillars off the trees with wooden chopsticks—those were wonderful field trips, the entire hillside teeming with school children fighting off the infestations of natural pests to help with the reforestation campaign. I still remember my tin can full of fuzzy, squirming caterpillars and the terrible odor as they were burned in a kerosene fire. A couple years later, trucks came through the neighborhoods spewing thick clouds of DDT and all the children were encouraged to run behind for the healthful “antiseptic” benefits (there is a great representation of this anti-mosquito campaign in the opening credits of the Korean film *Friends*).

I have vivid memories of those days under the Park regime with its public education campaigns, national sanitation initiatives, and government ideology, all linked to images of the art I saw nearly every day: school projects, community posters, billboards, newspaper ads. I was learning to read by looking at the comic books in the neighborhood *manhwabang*. I can still narrate episodes of Korean classical history just as well as the story of the boy and his ink-spewing squid, and I remember the pictures that showed the dangers of playing with explosives (I knew from scavenging artillery ranges that the posters were rather inaccurate).

Korean comics were printed on the cheapest of all recycled paper stock—“shit paper”—and yet they were still too expensive for a typical person to buy. Most stories were printed in multivolume sets of a dozen or so, or at least in *ha* (low) and *sang* (high) sets designating part 1 and part 2. The ink used for the interior printing was probably recycled from the mixed waste of colored inks from other press runs—it was never quite black, but usually a shade of blue ranging from a dark navy to a baby blue. In many books the color of the ink wasn't uniform throughout, and it was often refreshing to go from a dark ink to a lighter one—sort of like a change of atmosphere or lighting in a movie or a play.

Customers could pay by the hour or get a bargain by paying a flat rate and sit inside the dark, cramped interior of the *manhwabang* all day. The walls were entirely covered with comics displayed on shelves made of molding strips nailed at three or four levels along all four walls. The comics, digest-sized by American reckoning, were displayed from these thin ledges with their covers facing out, each volume slightly overlapping the previous one to save shelf space. The entire interior of the *manhwabang*—sometimes even the inside of the sliding doors—was covered with these shelves. In winter, I imagine all the paper added to the insulation, though the *manhwabang* was invariably freezing, heated only with a single tiny stove that burned high-sulfur charcoal cylinders. The owner usually lived in a tiny single room that opened facing the stove, and the place was illuminated by two dangling forty-watt bulbs at night. After dark, you could rent comics overnight, and I would often come back after spending the day there to pick up romances and histories for my older female relatives. At a time when our neighborhood had only two households with television (which their owners used as a moneymaker, charging admission), the nightly comic book rentals were like our Blockbuster Videos.

These days, comics in South Korea are much like their counterpart in Japan. They run the gamut of genres, they are no longer stigmatized as a major social vice, their creators are international celebrities, and they are sold to the general public in brightly-lit *manhwa* stores and in 7-11-style all-night conveniences as single-volume graphic novels.

I miss the old days.

2. Mighty Wing! What I have seen of North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) in photographs and film, and what I have heard and read of the country, reminds me of South Korea in the mid-1960s. The streets of Pyongyang are too clean and sparsely populated, to be sure, but much of what is visible and known of the outlying areas seems to be nearly half a century behind the South in terms of general development. One of the surprising features in rural areas is the anachronistic wood-fueled truck—something my older male relatives in the South recall from the era before the Korean War.

Ironically, one of the best descriptions of North Korea to appear in recent years is a comic book, *Pyongyang*, by the French animator/cartoonist Guy Delisle. Even if you have seen films and photos they do not come close to conveying the sense of scale, the emptiness, and the cold grayness of Pyongyang, which Delisle's gray-toned comic book memoir so effectively evokes.

Comics are unexpectedly effective in their ability to convey complex themes, and their form makes the reader unusually vulnerable to thematic content. The power of the holocaust narrative in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, for example, is amplified by the fact that its "funny animal" convention relaxes the reader's defense mechanisms. Though the content of the narrative may be no more intense than that of another Holocaust narrative, *Maus*'s tragedies are especially poignant because they strike us in a place usually reserved for the nice associations and nostalgia we have for figures like Mickey Mouse. *Maus*'s target audience, of course, is adult, and much can be said about how American comic books like *Uncle Scrooge* prey on children's vulnerabilities to promote western ideology (mostly capitalism), but because we live in the culture from which these works arise, it is difficult to discuss the issue of the conscious intentions behind them.

With North Korean comic books, it is an altogether different matter. They are produced quite explicitly to teach children the "Great Leader" Kim Il Sung's ideology of *Juche*, or "self reliance." North Korean writers and artists, since they must work under state supervision, are all taught the rules of *Juche* and how they must be applied. Kim's "*Juchemunhaknon*," the North Korean theory of literature (similar, in some ways to the old Soviet Socialist Realism), includes a section with instructions on writing for children.

I think I was initially drawn to translating the North Korean *manhwa* by how they reminded me of their South Korean counterparts of the 1960s, my formative reading materials in the *manhwahang* in my neighborhood. But early in the process of studying the comics, I realized I had stumbled upon a remarkable source of material for cultural analysis.

By 1994, the year *Mighty Wing* was published, which was also the year Kim Il Sung, the "Great Leader," died, the outside world knew about the drought conditions in North Korea. By 2000, all of this was commonly known. North Korea was receiving hundreds of thousands of tons of food and tens of millions of dollars in aid. The famine that hit North Korea by the mid 1990s was devastating. The consistent pattern flooding and drought caused by climate change ultimately resulted in the deaths of more than a quarter of a million people as reported by the DPRK (some estimates say the true figure is up to three million). By the late 1990s, only half the population had safe drinking water.

But the story in *Mighty Wing* shows that by that time, the country was already well aware of the drought and of the necessity for irrigation and for replenishing a depleting food supply. Since the publication date is 1994, it is likely that the book was produced in 1993, reflecting the concerns of the regime just prior to Kim Il Sung's death in July of 1994.

The Queen Bee refers to a drought that has been ongoing, and the plot of the story features a traitor among the honeybees who willfully misallocates labor resources to build the Queen a country house instead of applying it to the construction of a much-needed aqueduct. *Mighty Wing*, the hero of the story, is the one who comes up with the idea of building an irrigation system to save "The Garden of 1,000 Flowers" to help replenish the supplies of honey.

In this excerpt, we see that there is also an ever-present outside threat. The Wasp army, which had failed in an earlier attempt to conquer the Honeybees (due to *Mighty Wing*'s heroic efforts), has devised a new secret weapon, and when the Wasp General goes to meet with the King of Spiders, we see the symbolism of American/Japanese interests (represented by the Wasps, who are depicted in a way that draws on the North Korean stereotypes of the Japanese and Americans) coordinating with U.N. interests (the Spiders, whose web looks like the U.N. logo).

The Spiders' weapons system is a net, able to trap moving targets, while the Wasps' new weapon can hit moving targets at a distance (perhaps an inverted reference to the North Korean Nodong/Scud missiles tested in late May of 1993, which landed in the Sea of Japan to much international alarm—certainly a technology more advanced than the primitive *hwal* of the Wasps). I have kept the term *hwal*, which literally means "bow," to make it sound slightly secretive. In Korean, *hwal* is a *mugi*, i.e., a weapon, and it resonates with *haengmugi*, which means "atomic weapons," the threat America is constantly holding over the nation in popular representations.

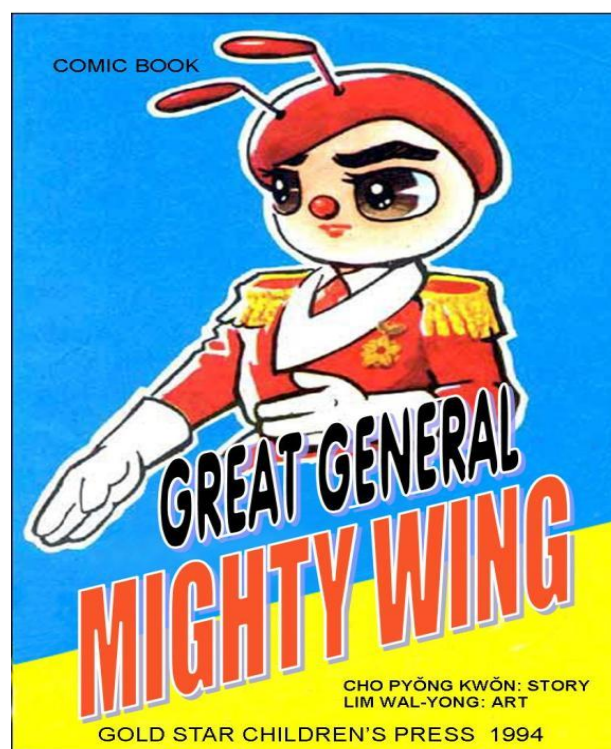
What exactly is it that the invaders want from the Honeybees? Of course, it is their self-sufficient *Juche* paradise, the kingdom that relies on "The Garden of 1,000 Flowers," which is the source of honey. The symbolism is borne out in nature. Common wasps often attempt to invade honeybee nests to steal their honey; the bees must defend their nest by stinging the wasps to death. Spiders and wasps are often mortal enemies of one another, but in this story, they temporarily ally with each other to conquer the bees. The traitorous general Zing-Zing, who has squandered the Honeybees' resources, has sold out for corrupt Capitalist interests and attempts to corrupt the Queen Bee by building those country homes (which the North Koreans would associate with the Soviet-era custom of corrupt party officials and their elaborate country *dachas*).

To an adult western reader, the overarching symbolism of the state as an industrious beehive is painfully transparent. It is, in fact, quite familiar to us in common logos. For example, the Masonic symbol on the back of a U.S. quarter is also the logo for the state of Utah. The beehive also happens to appear on signage for the City of Poughkeepsie, where I live.

Mighty Wing plays with deep mythic symbolism. Bees were thought, by the Egyptians, to come from the tears of the Sun god, Ra. In North Korean symbology, the Sun God is, of course the “Great Leader” Kim Il-sung himself, whose name (since it is written in the phonetic alphabet) could be read as *Kim* (metal/gold) *Il* (singular, unifying/sun) *Sung* (star). Both Kim Il-sung and his son, Kim Jung-il, though male, were also carefully associated, by the North Korean media, with maternal imagery in order to suggest that the state was both father and mother to the people. Symbolically, they are both of the solar lineage and also Queen Bees to the nation of diligent workers. To deliver this symbolic story in comic book form, accompanied by the marginal paratexts that range from Aesop-like aphorisms to paranoid political slogans, demonstrates a masterful and double-edged application of *Juche* literary theory. On the one hand, it is a poignant message to children, directed at preserving North Korea’s natural resources and modeling devotion to the state; on the other, it is military/political indoctrination at its most insidious.

Available at <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/?lab=ChoPyongKoMightyWing>

2. Get acquainted with the excerpt of the Korean manhwa **Great General Mighty Wing** by Cho Pyŏng Kwŏn



THE BRAVE WIN EVERY BATTLE AND THE BOLD CONQUER ALL.



LOOK—MIGHTY WINGS'S SQUAD WORKED THROUGH THE NIGHT AND THEY'VE ALREADY LAID THE PIPE ALL THE WAY UP TO HERE!



WOW, THEY'RE QUICK AS LIGHTNING!

I THINK THEY'RE GONNA BE DONE BEFORE US.

IT'S SUCH HARD WORK. HOW DID THEY POSSIBLY MAKE THE TIME TO DO ALL THAT!?



THERE, THAT'S THE LAST ONE. LET'S PLACE IT AND WE'RE DONE.



WE'VE FINISHED LAYING THE WATER PIPES. ALL RIGHT, FIRST SQUAD, RETURN TO THE TOP OF THE FALLS AND CONNECT THE INTAKE TO THE SOURCE!

EVEN WATER CAN PIERCE A ROCK—A STRONG WILL CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS.

THE SINGULAR PURPOSE OF FIREWORKS IS TO INSPIRE VICTORY.



FIRST SQUAD! EVERYONE, FOLLOW ME!



HURRAY!

WINGS THAT BEAT STRONGER THAN THE STORM WIND CAN NEVER BE BROKEN.



THE WATER'S GUSHING OUT!



THE GARDEN OF 1,000 FLOWERS SHALL NEVER KNOW DROUGHT AGAIN. THERE WILL BE BOUNTIFUL HARVEST EVERY YEAR, AND THE PRODUCTION OF HONEY WILL ALSO INCREASE.

THE SIGHT OF AN ENEMY'S SMILE—A PIERCING NEEDLE;



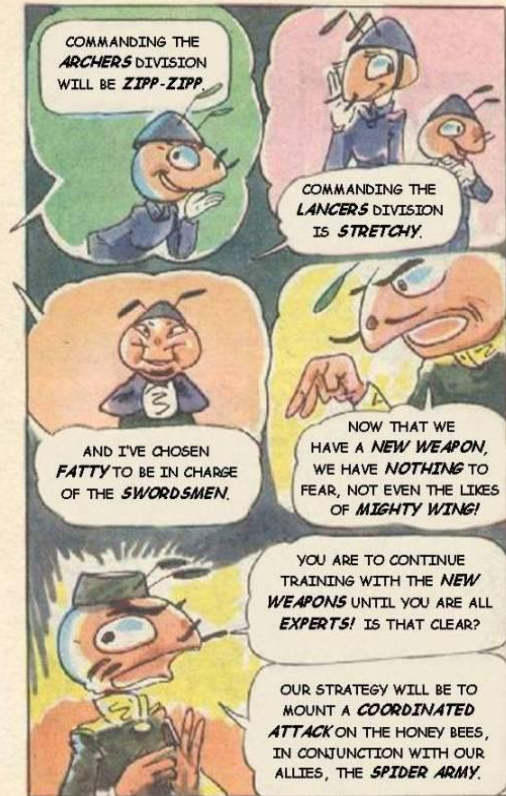
I HAVE COMPLETED MY NEW PLANS FOR THE **ATTACK ON THE HONEY BEES**, WHICH WILL COMMENCE IN A **FEW DAYS**.



IN KEEPING WITH MY **REVISED STRATEGY**, THE INITIAL ASSAULT WILL BE SPEARHEADED BY **THREE DIVISIONS**.

HIS SAVORING OF A SWEET TASTE—A POISON ARROW.

THOUGH THE ENEMY MAY BE NO MORE THAN A MOSQUITO, CONSIDER HIM NO LESS THAN AN ELEPHANT.



AND I'VE CHOSEN **FATTY** TO BE IN CHARGE OF THE **SWORDSMEN**.

NOW THAT WE HAVE A **NEW WEAPON**, WE HAVE **NOTHING** TO FEAR, NOT EVEN THE LIKES OF **MIGHTY WING!**

YOU ARE TO CONTINUE TRAINING WITH THE **NEW WEAPONS** UNTIL YOU ARE ALL **EXPERTS!** IS THAT CLEAR?

OUR STRATEGY WILL BE TO MOUNT A **COORDINATED ATTACK** ON THE HONEY BEES, IN CONJUNCTION WITH OUR ALLIES, THE **SPIDER ARMY**.

THE ENEMY OF A FRIEND OR THE FRIEND OF AN ENEMY—BE EQUALLY WARY OF BOTH.



THE NEXT DAY

LAIR OF THE SPIDER KING

TELL YOUR **KING** THE **WASP GENERAL** IS HERE TO SEE HIM.

PLEASE WAIT HERE A MOMENT.



YOUR **MAJESTY**, THE **WASP GENERAL** IS HERE TO SEE YOU...

GO AND TELL HIM HE MAY ENTER.



SO, YOU'RE TELLING ME THAT WE SHOULD MOUNT ANOTHER **JOINT CAMPAIGN** AGAINST THE HONEY BEES?

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK WE WILL NOT **FAIL** AGAIN? WE WERE **DEFEATED** BY **MIGHTY WING** LAST TIME.

RADICALS AND IDIOTS ARE BOTH MENTALLY DEFICIENT.



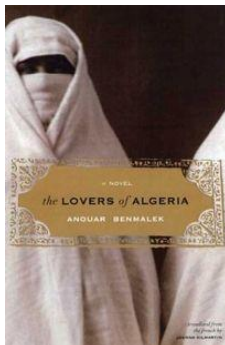
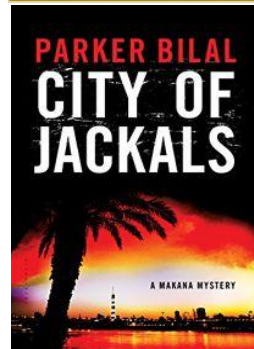
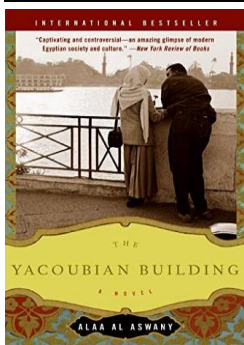
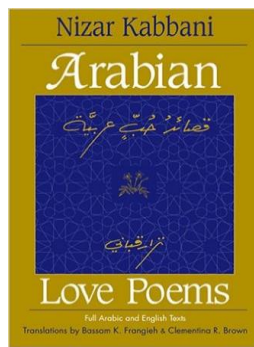
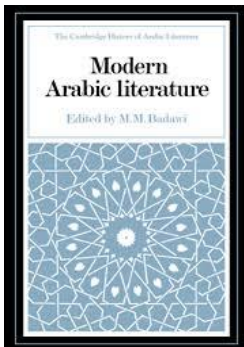
Translated by *Heinz Insu Fenkl*

Available at <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/?lab=ChoPyongKoMightyWing>

3. With your groupmate(s) discuss a theme that is worth of enlightening in a comic book. Think of a possible plot, characters, conflict. Make up a “manhwa”, illustrating your imaginary story.

Unit 4

Arabic Literature



In this unit you will read:

- On Modern Arabic Writing
- The Art of Fiction: Interview with Naguib Mahfouz (abridged)
- Naguib Mahfouz *The Toughest Guy in Utouf*
- Zakariya Tamer *Sprouts*

On Modern Arabic Writing

Arabic literature in English has a long history. Relatively few Arabs used English as a means of expression until recently, many more Arab writers have written in French, partly because of the length and intensity of French colonial rule in North Africa.

From the late 1960s Arabic literature became better known to English readers through translations into English of the most prominent authors, including Naguib Mahfouz, Yusuf Idris, Tayyeb Salih, Taha Hussein and Tawfiq al-Hakim. The award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz in 1988 raised the profile of Arabic literature in English translation.

Since 11 September 2001, there has been a sharp increase in the number and range of North African novels translated into English, both from Arabic and from French.

The establishment of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2007 has to encourage the readership of high quality Arabic literature internationally.

In the last decade numerous works by Arab authors have stood out on a world stage, and translations from Arabic or French have moved away from the margins. Since July, 2015, the Shubbak Literature Festival in association with the British Library features authors and poets who write in English, French and Dutch as well as those who write in Arabic.

Available at: <http://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2015/07/out-of-the-margins-arabic-literature-in-english.html>

The Art of Fiction: Interview With Naguib Mahfouz

Read the biography and the interview with Naguib Mahfouz, paying attention to his personal beliefs, which directed his behaviour and influenced his writing.

Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006), who in 1988 became the Arab world's first Nobel laureate in literature, has authored roughly sixty books covering virtually every style and genre of fiction. He has also produced numerous movie scripts and scenarios, including for many of the top films in Arab cinema history. Little known beyond his native region before his Nobel, his works now appear in over four hundred editions in thirty languages, evidently making him the writer to have most benefited in world recognition and sales as a result of this honor. In February 2005, he was named in the shortlist for the first Man Booker International Prize for fiction. In 1957, he won Egypt's highest plaudit in this field, the State Prize for Literature, for his legendary *Cairo Trilogy* (*Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, and *Sugar Street*) about life in the sprawling inner city. In 1992, he was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters as an honorary member, and he has received countless other awards internationally. This notoriety has also brought with it unprecedented perils. In 1994, Mahfouz narrowly survived an attempt on his life by an Islamist fanatic, apparently ordered by Shaykh Omar Abdel-Rahman, a close associate of Osama bin Laden, now serving life in a U.S. prison for conspiring to blow up key targets including the World Trade Center in New York. The attack on Mahfouz--the first of its kind on any Nobelist -- was in retaliation for his novel *Children of the Alley* (1959), an allegedly blasphemous allegory of humanity's journey from the Garden of Eden through the era of advanced science, still banned from Arabic publication in book form in Egypt by al-Azhar, the nation's great center of Islamic orthodoxy. After a swift and controversial military trial, two young men were hanged and eleven others sentenced to prison for conspiring in the assault and for plotting against the State. His writing hand partially paralyzed by the assailant's blade in his neck, after several years of intensive physiotherapy, Mahfouz resumed his creative output in 1999. He died in 2006.



The Interview with Naguib Mahfouz

Mahfouz in person is somewhat reserved, but always candid and direct. He laughs frequently and wears an old-fashioned dark blue suit, which he buttons to the top. He smokes, and he likes his coffee bitter.

– Charlotte El Shabrawy, 1992

When did you start writing?

In 1929. All my stories were rejected. Salama Musa – the editor of *Majalla* – used to say to me: You have potential, but you’re not there yet. September 1939 I remember well because it was the beginning of World War II, Hitler’s attack on Poland. My story, “Abath al-Aqdar,” was published, a sort of surprise gift from the *Majalla* publishers. It was an immensely important event in my life.

Did writing and publication then follow easily?

No . . . though after that first publication a friend of mine, a writer, came to me and told me about his brother who owned a printing press. He formed a publication committee with some colleagues who had had a little success. We began publishing in 1943 with some regularity. We published a story of mine every year.

But you never depended on your writing for a living?

No. I was always a government employee. On the contrary, I *spent* on literature – on books and paper. I didn’t make any money from my writing until much later. I published about eighty stories for nothing. Even my first novels I published for nothing, all to help the committee.

When did you begin to make money from your writing?

When my short stories were translated into English, French, and German. “Zabalawi” in particular was extremely successful and made me more money than any other story. The first novel of mine to be translated was *Midaq Alley*. The translation was first published by a Lebanese named Khayyat. Neither I nor the translator made any money because Khayyat cheated us. Heinemann published it again around 1970. After that it was translated into French, and other translations of my work soon followed.

Could you tell us about the notorious Kharafish group? Who belongs to it, and how was it formed?

We first became acquainted in 1943: Mustafa Mahmud, Ahmad Baha al-Din, Salah Jahin, Muhammad Afifi. We would hold discussions on art and on current political issues. *Kharafish* means “hoodlum” – those types found on the fringes of demonstrations and who start looting at the first opportunity, they are the kharafish. Ahmed Mazhar [one of Egypt’s leading actors] gave us the name. At first we used to meet at Muhammad Afifi’s house. Sometimes we would go to a place called Sahara City, near the pyramids. Now we go to the film director Tewfiq Saleh’s place because he has a balcony on the tenth floor, facing the Nile. There are four or five of us left.

Do you have much contact with the younger generation of Egyptian writers?

Every Friday evening I attend a session at the Casino Kasr el-Nil, to which new writers are invited. Many come: poets, writers, literary types . . .

What role did the political situation prior to 1952 play in your life?

I was about seven when the 1919 revolution took place. I became more and more affected by it and more and more enthusiastic about the cause. Everyone I knew was for the Wafd Party and freedom from colonization. Later I became much more involved in political life as an outspoken follower of Zaghlul Pasha Saad. I still consider that involvement one of the most important things I have done in my life. But I've never *worked* in politics, never been a member of an official committee or a political party. Although I was a Wafdist, I never wanted to be known as a party member; as a writer I wanted the total freedom that a party member can never have.

And 1952?

I was happy with that revolution. But unfortunately it did not bring about democracy.

Do you think progress has been made toward democracy and freedom since the time of Nasser and Sadat?

Oh yes, there's no doubt about that. In Nasser's time one feared the walls. Everyone was afraid. We would sit in the cafés, too afraid to talk. We would stay at home, too afraid to talk. I was afraid to talk to my children about anything that happened before the revolution – I was worried they would go to school and say something that would be misinterpreted. Sadat made us feel more secure. Hosni Mubarak? His constitution is not democratic, but *he* is democratic. We can voice our opinions now. The press is free. We can sit in our homes and speak loudly as though we were in England. But the constitution does need revising.

Do you think the Egyptian people are ready for full democracy? Do they really understand how it works?

In Egypt today most people are concerned with getting bread to eat. Only some of the educated really understand how democracy works. No one with a family has a free moment even to discuss it.

Have you had much trouble with censorship? Have you had to rewrite any of your manuscripts?

Not recently, but during World War II *Al-Qawra al-Jadida* and *Radibus* were censored. I was called a leftist. Censors called *Radibus* inflammatory because in it the people kill a king, and our king was still alive. I explained to them that it was simply a historical tale, but they claimed that it was false history, that the king in question had not been killed by the people but had died under "mysterious circumstances."

Didn't the censors also object to *The Children of Gabelawi*?

They did. Even though I was at the time in charge of all artistic censorship, the head of literary censorship advised me not to publish the book in Egypt in order to prevent conflict with the Al-Azhar – the main seat of Islam in Cairo. It was published in Beirut but not allowed into Egypt. This was in 1959, in Nasser's time. The book still can't be bought here. People smuggle it in.

What do you think about the Salman Rushdie case? Do you think a writer should have absolute freedom?

I'll tell you exactly what I think: Every society has its traditions, laws, and religious beliefs, which it tries to preserve. From time to time individuals appear who demand changes. I believe that society has the right to defend itself, just as the individual has the right to attack that with which he disagrees. If a writer comes to the conclusion that his society's laws or beliefs are no longer valid or even harmful, it is his duty to speak up. But he must be ready to pay the price for his outspokenness. If he is not ready to pay that price, he can choose to remain silent. History is full of people who went to prison or were burned at the stake for proclaiming their ideas. Society has always defended itself. Nowadays it does so with its police and its courts. I defend both the freedom of expression and society's right to counter it. I must pay the price for differing. It is the natural way of things.

Were you religious as a child? Did you go to the mosque with your father every Friday?

I was especially religious when I was young. But my father put no pressure on me to go to Friday prayers, even though he went every week. Later on I began to feel strongly that religion should be open; a closed-minded religion is a curse. Excessive concern with religion seems to me a last resort for people who have been exhausted by life. I consider religion very important but also potentially dangerous. If you want to move people, you look for a point of sensitivity, and in Egypt nothing moves people as much as religion. What makes the peasant work? Religion. Because of this, religion should be interpreted in an open manner. It should speak of love and humanity. Religion is related to progress and civilization, not just emotions. Unfortunately, today's interpretations of religion are often backward and contradict the needs of civilization.

What about women who cover their heads, or even their faces and hands? Is this an example of religion contradicting the needs of civilization?

Head covering has become a style, a fashion. It has no more meaning than that for most. But I do fear religious fanaticism . . . a pernicious development, totally opposed to mankind.

Do you pray these days?

Sometimes. But age prevents me at present. Between you and me, I consider religion an essential human behavior. Still, it's clearly more important to treat one's fellow man well than to be always praying and fasting and touching one's head to a prayer mat. God did not intend religion to be an exercise club.

You must have been asked many times about your reaction to receiving the Nobel. Did you have any inkling beforehand that you would win?

None at all. My wife thought I deserved it, but I had always suspected the Nobel was a Western prize; I thought they would never select an Eastern writer. There was a rumor, though, that two Arab writers had been nominated: Yusef Idris and Adonis.

Did you know you were being considered?

No. I was at Al-Ahram that morning. Had I stayed half an hour longer I would have found out immediately. But I went home and had lunch instead. The news came across the tickers at Al-Ahram and they called my house. My wife woke me up to tell me, but I thought she was joking and wanted to go back to sleep. Then she told me Al-Ahram was on the phone. I picked up to hear someone saying, Congratulations! It was Mr. Basha. Now Mr. Basha sometimes plays jokes on me, so I didn't take him seriously. I went into the living room in my pajamas and was just sitting down when the doorbell rang. Someone came in whom I assumed was a journalist, but he turned out to be the Swedish ambassador! So I excused myself to change . . . and that's how it happened.

How do you come up with the characters and ideas for your stories?

Let me put it this way. When you spend time with your friends, what do you talk about? Those things which made an impression on you that day, that week . . . I write stories the same way. Events at home, in school, at work, in the street, these are the bases for a story. Some experiences leave such a deep impression that instead of talking about them at the club I work them into a novel. Take, for instance, the case of a criminal who killed three people here recently. Beginning with that basic story, I would go on to make a number of decisions as to how to write it. I would choose, for example, whether to write the story from the point of view of the husband, the wife, the servant, or the criminal. Maybe my sympathies lie with the criminal. These are the sorts of choices that make stories differ from one another.

When you begin writing, do you allow the words to flow or do you prepare notes first? Do you start with a specific theme in mind?

My short stories come straight from the heart. For other works I do research first. Before beginning *The Cairo Trilogy*, for example, I did extensive research. I compiled a file on each character. If I hadn't done that I would have gotten lost and forgotten something. Sometimes a theme arises naturally out of the events in a story, and sometimes I will have one in mind before I begin. If I know beforehand that I want to portray a human being's ability to surmount whatever evil may befall him, I will create a hero capable of demonstrating that idea. But I also begin stories by writing about a character's behavior at length, allowing the theme to emerge later on.

Neither the short story nor the novel is part of the Arab literary heritage. How do you explain your success with these forms?

We Arab writers did borrow the modern concept of the short story and the novel from the West, but by now they have been internalized in our own literature. Many translations came our way during the forties and fifties; we took their style to be simply the way stories were written. We used the Western style to express our own themes and stories. But don't forget that our heritage includes such works as *Ayyam al-Arab*, which contains many stories – among them “Antar” and “Qays and Leila” – and of course *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Do you identify with any of your characters?

Kamal from the trilogy represents my own generation – our ideas, our choices, our dilemmas and psychological crises – and so his character is in that sense

autobiographical. But he is universal at the same time. I also feel close to Abdul Gawad, the father . . . open to life in all its aspects, he loves his friends and he never wittingly hurts anyone. The two together represent both halves of my personality. Abdel Gawad is very gregarious, loves art and music; Kamal is inhibited and shy, serious and idealistic.

Let's talk about a specific example of your writing: *The Thief and the Dogs*. How did you begin?

The story was inspired by a thief who terrorized Cairo for a while. His name was Mahmoud Suleiman. When he got out of prison he tried to kill his wife and his lawyer. They managed to escape unharmed, but he was killed in the process. . . . I created the story from his character. At the time I was suffering from a persistent and peculiar sense that I was being pursued, and also the conviction that under the political order of the time our lives had no meaning. So when I wrote the criminal's story, I wrote my own story along with it. A simple crime tale became a philosophical meditation on the times! I subjected the main character, Sayyid Mahran, to all my confusion, my perplexities. I put him through the experience of looking for answers in the sheikh, in the "fallen woman," in the idealist who has betrayed his ideas for money and fame. The writer, you see, is not simply a journalist. He interweaves a story with his own doubts, questions, and values. That is art.

What about the role of religion in the story? Is faith in God the path to true happiness, as the sheikh suggests? Is Sufism the answer the criminal is looking for?

The sheikh rejects life as we know it. The criminal, on the other hand, is trying to solve his immediate problems. They are in two different worlds. I love Sufism as I love beautiful poetry, but it is not the answer. Sufism is like a mirage in the desert. It says to you, come and sit, relax and enjoy yourself for a while. I reject any path that rejects life, but I can't help loving Sufism because it sounds so beautiful . . . It gives relief in the midst of battle . . .

What of Nur, the woman in the story? And women such as Nefisa in *The Beginning and the End* and Zohra in *Miramar*? These characters, although "fallen," are clearly good-hearted, and appear to embody the only hope for the future.

That is correct, although I intended Nefisa also to demonstrate the consequences of dishonorable conduct in a typical Egyptian family.

Do you condone that type of punishment?

I, with most Egyptians, feel that punishment on that level is too severe. On the other hand, an Egyptian man who does not respond the way Nefisa's brother did cannot continue to live in this society. Whether or not he wants to, he is obliged to kill the dishonored girl. He cannot escape it. And it will be a long time before this tradition changes, although its force has lessened somewhat recently, especially in the cities.

Things seem to be changing, though, wouldn't you say?

Things are beginning to change. The position of the woman in the household has become much stronger, mainly due to education, although there are other factors.

Who do you think should have the upper hand in the household? Who should make the decisions?

A marriage is like a company with equal partners. No one rules. If there is a disagreement, the more intelligent of the two should override. But each family is different. Often the power depends on money; whoever makes the most money has the most strength. There are no fixed rules.

In very conservative, traditional societies such as Egypt, don't women often have great power over men?

Certainly, and recent history proves it. Men with considerable political or military power will fall into the hands of strong women who influence their decisions. These women rule from behind the curtain, from behind the veil.

Why are the majority of your heroines women from the lower strata of society? Do you intend them to symbolize anything larger? Egypt, for example?

No. By writing about lower-class women I simply intended to show that during the period in which these novels are set women had no rights. If a woman couldn't find a good husband or divorce a bad one, she had no hope. Sometimes her only recourse was, unfortunately, illicit behavior. Until very recently, women have been a deprived lot with very few rights . . . even basic rights such as freedom of choice in marriage, divorce, and education. Now that women are being educated, this situation is changing, because a woman who is educated has a weapon.

What is the subject closest to your heart? The subject you most love to write about?

Freedom. Freedom from colonization, freedom from the absolute rule of a king, and basic human freedom in the context of society and the family. These types of freedom follow from one to the other. In the trilogy, for example, after the revolution brought about political freedom, Abdul Gawad's family demanded more freedom from *him*.

What is the most difficult situation you have had to face in your life?

Most certainly it was the decision to dedicate myself to writing, thereby accepting the lowest standard of living for myself and my family. It was especially difficult since the prospect of money was dangled before me . . . Around 1947 I was given the chance to work as a scriptwriter with the best in the field. I began working with Salah Abu Seif, but I gave it up. I refused to continue. I didn't work with him again until after the war when everything became expensive. Before that, I wouldn't think of it. And my family accepted these sacrifices.

Many prominent writers, especially in the West, are known for their decadent private lives – their excessive drinking, drug use, unusual sexual habits, suicidal tendencies . . . but you appear to be perfect!

Well . . .

Perhaps that is your greatest flaw?

It is certainly a defect. But you are judging me in my dotage. In my younger days I did all those things – I drank, I pursued the gentler sex, and so forth.

Are you optimistic about the future of the Middle East, particularly in view of the Gulf War and continued violence?

At my age it is unseemly to be pessimistic. When you are young you can declare that there is no hope for mankind, but when you are older, you learn to avoid encouraging people to hate the world.

But what about a conception of the hero? Heroes don't seem to exist in your stories, nor indeed in the stories of any contemporary Egyptian writer.

It's true that there are no heroes in most of my stories – only characters. Why? Because I look at our society with a critical eye and find nothing extraordinary in the people I see. The generation before mine, influenced by the 1919 uprisings, saw heroic behavior - the worker able to overcome unusual obstacles, that kind of hero. Other writers – Tawfiq al-Hakim, Muhammed Husayn Haykal, Ibrahim Abd al-Quadir al-Mazini – write about heroic types. But on the whole, our generation is very apathetic and a hero is a rare thing; you can't put a hero in a novel unless it is a work of fantasy.

How would you describe a hero?

There are many heroes in ancient Arabic literature, all of them horsemen, knights. But a hero today would for me be one who adheres to a certain set of principles and stands by them in the face of opposition. He fights corruption, is not an opportunist, and has a strong moral foundation.

Do you consider yourself a hero?

Me?

Aren't you a model, for your children and your public, of one who stands by his principles in the face of adversity?

Yes, certainly. But I don't think of myself as a hero.

How, then, would you describe yourself?

Someone who loves literature. Someone who believes in and is sincere about his work. Someone who loves his work more than money or fame. Of course, if money and fame come, they are welcome! But they have never been my goal. Why? Because I love writing more than anything else. It may be unhealthy, but I feel that without literature my life would have no meaning. I might have good friends, travel, luxuries, but without literature my life would be miserable. It's a strange thing, but not really, because most writers are the same way. This is not to say I have done nothing but write in my life. I am married, I have children. Then, since 1935, I have had a sensitivity in my eyes that prevents me from reading or writing during the summer, so this has imposed a balance on my life – a balance sent down by God! Each year I must live for three months as a man who is not a writer. Those three months I meet my friends and stay out until morning. And I haven't lived?

By Charlotte El Shabrawy

Excerpted from *The Art of Fiction* N° 129. The Interview With Naguib Mahfouz //
The Paris Review. – Issue 123, Summer 1992.

Available at <http://www.theparisreview.org/viewinterview.php/prmMID/2062>

After You Read

1. Summarize what you have read about Naguib Mahfouz, mentioning his attitude towards politics (state and democracy), religion, criminality and punishment, women position in the society, male-female relationships, fame, writing (choosing themes, characters, etc.)?
2. Say how your life position in terms of main life values coincides with or differs from Naguib Mahfouz' one.

Naguib Mahfouz: The Toughest Guy in Utouf

Before You Read

1. Do you know how theft is treated in the Arabic countries? Is it considered to be a major or minor offence?
2. What kind of punishment is imposed on to the person guilty of theft?
3. Read the title of the story. What image do you picture when thinking of “a tough guy”?
4. a) Find synonyms to the following adjectives.

*e.g. **potent** – strong, powerful, mighty, forceful, effective, influential*

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squalid, peerless, morose, dogged

- b) Work out the meanings of the following nouns. Use a dictionary if necessary.

*e.g. **evasion** – an excuse or trick to avoid or get around something:*

**visage, audacity, vanity, temerity,
zeal, opulence, obduracy, bravura,
penury, salvation**

- c) Use 4 of the above nouns and adjectives in the sentences of your own.

*e.g. Her polite agreement was an **evasion** concealing what she really felt.*

5. Look at the following words and expressions used in the story. Match the words to the left with their definitions to the right. What do they suggest about the story?

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 1 vagrancy | a a violent man, a gangster |
| 2 defamation | b the crime of physically attacking someone |
| 3 thug | c to officially record a written or spoken statement in which someone complains about |

Answers

the while, his grave-faced friend kept looking back and forth from the gangster's gloomy visage to the legal warning stretched between his fidgeting fingers.

Boss Bayumi's build was so strong and bold that one could not pass him by without turning to stare. True, his shabby appearance and squalid, threadbare clothes exposed his abject poverty. Yet his solid frame, broad chest and massive, flexing muscles flaunted his power and audacity. The look in his eye and his macho mannerisms were clearly inspired by vanity and violence. Those scars etched across his face and his forehead, along with the traces of a knife-slash along the front of his throat, all testified that he rushed eagerly into battles of terrifying brutality. Hence, when angry, a fearsome silence enveloped him that would still the wagging tongues of taxi drivers' relatives. With rancorous wrath, he turned to his friend and wailed, "Me . . . *me* – Bayumi al-Fawwal – has the world turned this much against me?" The matter loomed larger and larger to him as he pounded his fist into his palm, his tongue ceaselessly spewing its menacing imprecations. And they could be more than just menacing imprecations . . . In the past, he spoke little when he was angry. Rather, his ire would wrap itself in even more irritation until his harsh retribution landed on the head of his enemy. Now, nothing remained of this past but memories that floated about from time to time in his overburdened brain. Then a brilliant light from the prime of his

own side. All the while he studied their techniques in combat from close up, filling himself with the zeal for fighting and acts of derring-do. He had not even approached lost power and glory would briefly radiate through the deepening darkness.

Il-Mi'allim ("Boss") Bayumi grew up in Utouf. From his early youth he displayed a natural-born temerity. He was the pick of the boys that gathered around the one-eyed top thug, the *futuwa* who terrorized the local residents and ran circles around the forces of law and order. He would sit facing the crime boss, listening to the tales of his adventures, observing his battles, and emerging from the rear-guard of his gang when it rushed into combat with their rivals from Darrasa or Husseiniya at the foot of the Muqattam mountain. In the lap of his *gallabeya*, rolled and held up with one hand, he would carry bits of gravel and chunks of glass, supplying them to the fighters from his his eighteenth year when his arms became strong and his muscles massive. He had a formidable talent in the art of forehead-butting but also in using the club, the knife, and the chair, as virtues, granted him preference, treated him like a brother, and made him his own right well. He took part in individual battles as well as group altercations, excelling in them all. His fame as a fighter spread far and wide, as he went out alone to confront scores of men with a heart that held no fear of death. He'd destroy an entire coffeehouse if the waiter so much as asked him to pay for his drink. The one-eyed man, admiring these -hand, sharing his loot and his booty with him. And when One Eye died, Bayumi ascended to the *futuwa*'s throne, alone. His ambitions scorned any kind of peace or rest – so he challenged the *futuwa* of Husseiniya, and he beat him. Then he took on the boss of Darrasa, and routed him, too. He ventured out with his entourage to the district of Wayli, whose local boss he humbled, trouncing his gang soundly. His name rang throughout all those quarters like a warning of a deadly raid, as the other *futuwas* surrendered to his superiority. So potent was he that it was said even the Evil Eye could not touch him for at least a

generation. He made his headquarters at the Gazelle Cafe in Khurunfush where he met with his helpers and his young hangers-on. He forced the rich folks and the traders, the coffeehouse owners, and even the Suares Company that owned the tram lines, to obey him submissively. Whoever balked at paying what he demanded risked exposing whatever they owned to utter ruin. This was in addition to his acts of personal vengeance and intimidation, as well as his protection of some of the ladies of the night. Many people courted his affection by offering him expensive gifts, which he would accept like one above such things, without a hint of interest or gratitude.

And so Boss Bayumi lived a satisfying life in the shade of his own authority, in opulence and luxury. He wore a gallabeya made of silk, under a camel-hair cape, over which he wrapped a costly cashmere mantle. He rode about in a fancy, gold-daubed carriage drawn by horses of perfect beauty. Then he fell in love with an alma – a woman trained in entertaining men with song, dance and sex – and married her. His wedding feast was made a party for all the people in Gamaliya, Utouf and Darrasa together. The procession was organized by the futuwas in all the nearby neighborhoods, plus a number of ex-convicts, parolees and those who were continually in and out of prison. The nights of this feast were enlivened by the performances of the renowned Shaykh Nada, 'Abd al-Latif al-Banna and Bamba ("Pinkie") Kashr. Afterwards Bayumi kept rising higher and higher until he reached the pinnacle of his glory in the elections of 1924 – in which his sway over many politicians in Egypt was established. They gave generously to him, hoping to obtain his backing, haggling over the votes of his followers and underlings. The Gazelle Café witnessed many pashas and beys sitting with Boss Bayumi al-Fawwal, wooing him with chatter. He would listen to them attentively while making himself master over their money. Yet on the day of the polls, he and his close companions went to the police stations to vote for the candidates in the list of Sa'd Zaghloul – who, of course, opposed that of his corrupted cronies.

From that time on, he would call all these pashas and beys "imbeciles" – even while boasting of his contacts with them. Many times in conversation he would let drop, "Pasha So-and-So said to me," or "I said to Pasha Such-and-Such."

But those days disappeared. The time that followed was very cruel, with many grueling hardships. The futuwas did not grasp that the police had become fed up with their reign of terror, and were preparing to put paid to their vicious behavior. They sent a young officer down to Husseiniya who was peerless in courage, strength and obduracy in the whole Interior Ministry.

His primary target was Boss Bayumi. He didn't bother to challenge him. Nor did he wait until he'd gathered legal evidence, because he knew no one would have the nerve to testify against him. He and his troopers just attacked him suddenly. They took him to the station where he ordered his men to beat him savagely. Bayumi was baffled by such bold aggression against him. All the officer had to do was to repeat the assault once or twice until his bravura was broken. So, surrounded by all his heavily-armed soldiers, he kept driving the futuwa in front of him, slapping him in every alley along

the road, kicking him in front of every coffee house, bringing the harshest punishment down on any of his minions that they found. Snapping out of their reverie – with the knot of fear that had tied their tongues now loosened – the people scrambled to the police post to file complaints against him. Hence the officer found the proof he had needed. With it, he tossed Boss Bayumi into the wilderness of prison, to taste the most disgusting of horrors and torments. As a result, the fallen futuwa felt the very terrorism that he himself had inflicted upon others for so long.

He spent several years in confinement. When he finally got out, he found none of the old futuwas there to congratulate or even greet him. No one came to tell him, as they normally would, "Prison is for the brave." Every one of them had gone his own way. Some were themselves in prison, while others had moved from Husseiniya. Still others contented themselves with working for a living, as people do when trying to survive. He returned to the world morose and abandoned, his glory but a painful memory for which no person consoled him by saying, "May God have mercy," as one does to the bereaved. Even his wife grew tired of his begging and penury, leaving him to resume her practice of the thespian arts in the theatres on Muhammad Ali Street. His agonies ground up his giant, arrogant soul, until its owner was staggering so much under their weight that he could not even mouth a word of protest under the dreaded eyes of the police staring at him from every side. He languished in this state of worry and pain until he received the fateful warning against vagrancy, which gave him the choice between gainful employment and prison.

In these hours of the worst distress, his mind was filled with images of his salad days dancing before his eyes, that were filmed over with angst. During those trying times, his friend the driver would watch him slyly as his fingers played with the warning that caused him so much rage. The matter remained critical in the driver's mind, and as he turned it over and over in his thoughts, he swiveled to look at the former futuwa.

"What would you say, Boss," he asked, "if I offered you a job that would keep the heat off your back?"

Bayumi fixed him with a strange look without saying a word. His silence encouraged his friend to jump ahead by saying, "First I'll teach you how to drive a car – it's a racket you can make a living at. No doubt you're already an expert on all the roads here and how to get around on them. Meanwhile, I can get you a spot in the same garage where I work, on the condition that you humble yourself enough to be happy with it. So what do you say, Boss?"

The mi'allim felt no rush of elation, as might have been expected of one in his situation, simply because work was the one thing he had never known. Never important to professional futuwas, he recoiled from it with instinctive fear. Yet, so long as labor was his sole salvation from a return to prison, he was not in a position to turn down any job. "Is it possible I could be hired for this work before the twenty days are up?" he said to his friend, barely able to conceal his annoyance.

"Without a doubt," he replied. "You're missing just one thing, though."

"What's that?"

"A suit, Boss," he rejoined. "There's no way you can be a professional driver without a suit. Buy or rent one, or borrow one as you please, but there's no choice about having one."

He thought deeply and seriously about this, wondering how he could find a suit. That he might find the elusive object with his friend the driver or with any of his fellows never occurred to him, for he knew that all of them owned only the one suit they always wore. Nevertheless, he did not despair for he still had the affluent men that not long ago had wished all evil away from him and only good things for him. Surely, it wasn't possible they would begrudge him an old suit that, all his life, the Fates had decreed he would never need. He stood blocking the doorways of the well-dressed people that he once knew, politely begging them – in a language utterly unlike that which they were used to hearing from him – to give up one old suit for his sake. But they answered only with endless excuses. A few pleaded that they owned only one suit besides the one they had on at the moment. Another two or three begged off helping him due to their own straitened conditions, like having too many children, not to mention the pressure of the current economic crisis upon their finances. One man even claimed – with a guilty cough – that his servant deserved to inherit his old suit. All these evasions astounded Bayumi.

A fierce anger gripped him as he swore to himself stubbornly, "So long as a suit will save me from prison, then I'm going to get my hands on one, no matter how dogged I have to be."

He was trampling aimlessly along one day when he found himself facing a laundry shop at the start of Fountain Street. He glanced over it quickly and saw that suits were hanging inside. He stopped and rested his back against a nearby tree, staring ravenously at the garments crammed tightly together the way that a starving man eyes the cuts of meat dangling over a kabab-griller's stove. He cased the place carefully, noting that the drab, darkened shop was located next to a garage, and behind it was the empty Desert of the Aqueduct. Feverish thoughts whirled madly in his mind – until he arrived at a firm decision.

In the morning the laundry man came to open his shop, and was horrified to find that a hole had been bashed through its back wall. His heart thumping, he rushed over to check on his customers' clothes.

They were all there – except for one suit. His surprise was as great as his sense of dismay.

In any case, Boss Bayumi became a taxi driver, after all, and the officer who ran the Husseiniya police station lost his power over him. For whatever reason, Bayumi chose far-away Giza to be the place where he would mainly work, and so did not bother to dye the suit or otherwise alter it, as an experienced burglar would have done. Nor would he have tolerated his regimen of constant toil, but for the thought of the penitentiary as the more painful and loathsome alternative. Though despising it, he contented himself with obeying people's shouts and ferrying them about. He even

began to respect those whom in days of old he had looked down upon with scorn, dismissing them as fools.

His new life was not uneventful, however. One day, just before sunset, when he had spent not quite a month in his job, he was waiting for customers at his usual spot, when a distinguished-looking man appeared at the door of the Casino il-Fantazio and called him over. Speedily the Boss hurried to him, leaping from his seat to open the door for the obviously important gentleman. A moment passed as he waited for him to get in, but the man did not move. Mystified, Bayumi looked at him, only to find that he was staring back at him in disbelief, or rather, he was gaping at his suit. The Boss' heart pounded: he felt like one who had fallen into a trap. He made to get away, but the man reached in and grabbed his jacket's collar. He pulled it back to read the tailor's name, then seized the shocked mi'allim by the arm.

"Stop, you thief!" he screamed. "Where did you get this suit?"

He hailed a policeman at the top of his lungs. Boss Bayumi glared at him as though he could, without a doubt, have knocked him down if he wished. Instead, he felt a strange sense of helplessness and seemed to pass out of consciousness, all he knew was that the cop had laid hold of him. Clearly, the luck which had been his ally of yore had deserted him forever, and he would again endure the agonies of prison.

First published in Arabic as *Futuwat al-'Utuf* copyright (c) 1940 by Naguib Mahfouz

English translation by Raymond Stock copyright (c) 2006

Available at: <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/?lab=TheToughestGuy>

After you read

Understanding the Text: Analysis

1. Define the method the author uses to reveal the personality of the character of the story: direct description; description of the character's speech, thoughts or actions; reactions of other characters to his behaviour.
2. Indicate the setting and climax of the story.
3. Formulate the theme(s) and conflict(s) of the story.
4. Elicit the meaning of the following context phrases and dwell on their figurative meaning and their expressiveness.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ▪ to blow off steam | ▪ to froth and foam |
| ▪ to keep the heat off smb's head | ▪ to have the nerve to do smth |
| ▪ to snap out of one's reverie | ▪ to tie smb's tongues |
| ▪ to shoot a look | ▪ the knot of fear |
| ▪ the pinnacle of glory | ▪ salad days |
| ▪ corrupted cronies | ▪ rancorous wrath |
| ▪ to arrive at a decision | ▪ to loom large |

5. Consider the use of simile in the following context sentences:

He stopped and rested his back against a nearby tree, staring ravenously at the garments crammed tightly together *the way that a starving man eyes the cuts of meat dangling over a kabab-griller's stove.*

His surprise was *as great as his sense of dismay.*

The Boss' heart pounded: he felt *like one who had fallen into a trap.*

6. The Swedish Academy of Letters, in its citation for the prize, noted that Mahfouz “through works rich in nuance – now clear-sightedly realistic, now evocatively ambiguous – has formed an Arabic narrative art that applies to all mankind.” Comment on the citation.

Available at: http://aucpress.com/t-aboutnm.aspx?template=template_naguibmahfouz

7. The author leaves for the reader to decide what happened to Boss Bayumi. Make up a possible ending of the story.

Looking at Language: Vocabulary and Grammar

1. Restore the collocations from the text. Translate them into Ukrainian.

Beginning	Ending	Restored collocation	Translation
solid	men	the affluent men	заможні люди
abject	employment		
gainful	sullen		
formidable	poverty		
the affluent	frame		
straitened	talent in		
loot	conditions		
threadbare	and booty		
to grow	clothes		

2. Elicit the meaning of the following verbs. Decide which language register they belong to: are they neutral, bookish or colloquial?

e.g. to rejoin is a formal way of saying something in reply, usually used in literature to emphasize rude or angry behavior.

**to clutch, to console, to inflict,
to begrudge, to turn down (a job),
to bash, to gape, to flaunt, to languish,
to haggle over, to excel, to humble**

3. Define the part of speech of the italicized word and dwell on the use of its form.

The gathering roar grew *louder* and *higher* the *further* he drew away from the scene of his humiliation, gradually turning into curses, insults and sheer defamation – all screamed at the top of his lungs – by the time he reached King Farouq Square.

4. Explain the use of the auxiliary verb *did*.

Nor *did* he wait until he'd gathered legal evidence, because he knew no one would have the nerve to testify against him.

5. Dwell on the use of *would* in the following context sentences.

- During those trying times, his friend the driver *would* watch him slyly as his fingers played with the warning that caused him so much rage.
- Nor *would* he have tolerated his regimen of constant toil, but for the thought of the penitentiary as the more painful and loathsome alternative.

6. Define the types of the conditional sentences.

- He made his way towards it, and the driver-*as though he knew him*-swung the door open for him.
- I've been ordered to find gainful employment within twenty days-*or else they'll slap me back in the joint all over again*.
- "What would you say, Boss," he asked, "*if I offered you a job that would keep the heat off your back?*"
- Meanwhile, I can get you a spot in the same garage where I work-*on the condition that you humble yourself enough to be happy with it*.
- Nor would he have tolerated his regimen of constant toil, *but for the thought of the penitentiary as the more painful and loathsome alternative*.
- Boss Bayumi glared at him *as though he could*, without a doubt, *have knocked him down if he wished*.

Culture Point:

1. Give examples of culturally marked words. Suggest their Ukrainian translations.

2. Study the phenomenon of “futuwas” in Egypt. Are there similar people and groupings in other cultures? Prepare to give a short talk on the topic.

Zakariya Tamer “Sprouts”

Before you read

1. The story you are going to read deals with an episode from the school life. You must have read similar stories before. What are they?
2. What do you know about schooling in the Arabic countries?
3. Read the title of the story. Think of any associations it arouses in you. Do you think it carries any symbolic information?
4. a) Explain the following words, using dictionary if necessary:

**rebuke, no avail, oblivious to,
to confer with, anthem, to yield**

- b) elicit the meaning of the following context phrases:

- urged him to shake a leg
- cast hate-filled glances at
- as if ridding himself of disgusting rubbish
- to belt out – to the tune of the national anthem - a well-known love song
- at this turn of events

- c) use 6 of the above words and phrases in the sentences of your own.

5. Read the context sentences and suggest prepositions to fill in the gaps.

1. He tossed the papers the wastebasket ...
2. The pupils whispered to one another grumbling voices.
3. When I reach three, you will all start singing the national anthem unison.
4. Then the pupils rushed him like a shot and began beating him their rulers, texts, notebooks, and feet ...
5. Then the pupils' voices, which were raised harmonious concord ...

4. Read about the author of the story and think how his life experience could influence his writing of the story.

Zakariya Tamer, an influential master of the Arabic language short story, was born in Damascus, Syria, in 1931. His formal schooling was abbreviated and he is largely an autodidact. His works began appearing in the 1960s, and he then worked for a time for Syrian cultural entities. He left Syria in 1981 and has lived in England since. He is known particularly for his many volumes of short stories, which are often reminiscent of folktales or children's stories. His works, however, have a sharp edge and are often a surrealistic protest against political or social oppression and exploitation. One of his most famous collections is *Tigers on the Tenth Day and Other Stories*.



Available at: <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/?author=ZakariyaTamer>

A common theme in his writing has been that the strongest of us can gradually be broken and tamed by those who wield the whip of power. Those who rule, Zakaria Tamer tells us in many a story, while devoid of all the noble qualities that should be theirs, possess the intuitive awareness of how to use the carrot and the stick. An Arab critic once contrasted him with Charles Darwin: One showing how humans developed from monkeys, the other showing how humans could be manipulated into becoming monkeys.

Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zakaria_Tamer

Read the story noting what you feel about the teacher and pupils' behaviour in the particular episode.

Sprouts *Zakariya Tamer*

As he did every morning, Bilal al-Dandashi headed to school. Arriving late, he entered trembling from fear of his teacher, whose rebuke would be crude and sarcastic. He discovered, however, that all the pupils and teachers were asleep. He tried to rouse them but to no avail. Feeling bored as he sat there alone, he yawned and fell asleep. While sleeping he dreamt he was in a school where the pupils were sleeping so soundly that they were oblivious to their teachers' angry cries. Then his mother woke him and urged him to shake a leg so he would not be late for school. He

hurried off to his school, where he found the teachers conferring with one another and the pupils playing merrily. He did not join their games, however, because his mother had roused him to go to school. He had dressed quickly, left the house without eating, and rushed to school. He took a seat among the pupils in his class, preparing for what would happen next. The teacher, who entered with a scowling face and glowering eyes, cast hate-filled glances at his young pupils, who were whispering clandestinely to each other. Then he shouted angrily at them, "Shut up!"

The pupils immediately fell silent, and the teacher placed his worn briefcase on his table, opened it, and took out a set of papers, which he waved in the air as he asked, "Do you know what these are? They're your written responses to my question about what career you will choose when you become men."

The teacher stepped toward the wastebasket. Waving the papers in the air again, he told the pupils, "These essays don't even deserve a zero."

He tossed the papers into the wastebasket as if ridding himself of disgusting rubbish and told his pupils, "I have spent days teaching you the official national anthem so you can sing it at the party marking the end of the school year. Today I will examine your ability to memorize. Woe to anyone who fails."

The pupils whispered to one another in grumbling voices. So their teacher screamed at them furiously voice, "Shut up!"

The pupils fell silent, and their teacher said to them, "I'm going to count from one to three. When I reach three, you will all start singing the national anthem in unison. Go on. Get ready. One . . . two . . . three!"

Exchanging meaningful looks, the pupils began loudly and enthusiastically to belt out-to the tune of the national anthem-a well-known love song. Their teacher shouted at them: "Shut up!"

Then the pupils rushed at him like a shot and began beating him with their rulers, texts, notebooks, and feet, demanding that he shut up. Taken by surprise at this turn of events, the teacher called angrily for help, but none of the school personnel came to his rescue.

He staggered and fell to the floor after receiving painful blows to his shins. He tried to resist, to menace them, and to endure the attack, but the overwhelming pain made him cry and beg them to stop hitting him. They ignored his pleas, however, and did not quit until he yielded and fell mute. Then they tied him up with ropes they had brought and ordered him to sing the national anthem. He hastened to obey their command, rendering the anthem in a quavering,



tremulous voice while they stuck their fingers in their ears and groaned with disapproval. Bilal al-Dandashi then separated from the other pupils to stand before them, adopting the stance favored by their teacher. He shouted at them in a merry tone of command, "One . . . two . . . three!"

Then the pupils' voices, which were raised in harmonious concord as they sang the national anthem, all united into a single voice that surged from the school's windows like a wave.

Translated by *William Maynard Hutchins*

Available at: <http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article.php?lab=Sprouts>

After you read

Understanding the Text: Analysis

1. Indicate the setting and climax of the story.
2. Was the denouement of the story more unexpected than anticipated for you?
3. Taking into account the three levels of meaning in literature, formulate the theme of the story.
4. What's the narrator's attitude towards the characters of the story? Is he neutral, humorous, ironical, sympathetic, etc to them? Give reasons.
5. Do you agree that the schoolmaster is acting as a dictator? Do you think that this is the usual way he behaves in the classroom? Explain your point of view.
6. Define the stylistic function of similes in the following context sentences:
 - Then the pupils rushed at him *like a shot* and began beating him with their rulers, texts, notebooks, and feet, demanding that he shut up.
 - Then the pupils' voices, which were raised in harmonious concord as they sang the national anthem, all united into a single voice that surged from the school's windows *like a wave*.
7. Find epithets the author uses in his story and dwell on their expressiveness.

Looking at Language: Vocabulary and Grammar

1. Restore the collocations from the text. Translate them into Ukrainian.

Beginning	Ending	Restored collocation	Translation
to come	look		
to endure	silent		
to sleep	smb's pleas		
to fall	to rescue		
a meaningful	soundly		
to ignore	the attack		

2. Examine the following context sentences, define the part of speech of the words in italics and determine the syntactic functions they perform in the sentences. Find other examples of the use of the verbals in the story.

- *Arriving* late, he entered *trembling* from fear of his teacher, whose rebuke would be crude and sarcastic.
- The teacher, who entered with a *scowling* face and *glowering* eyes, cast *hate-filled* glances at his young pupils ...
- The pupils immediately fell silent, and the teacher placed his *worn* briefcase on his table...
- Then the pupils rushed at him like a shot and began *beating* him with their rulers, texts, notebooks, and feet, *demanding* that he shut up.

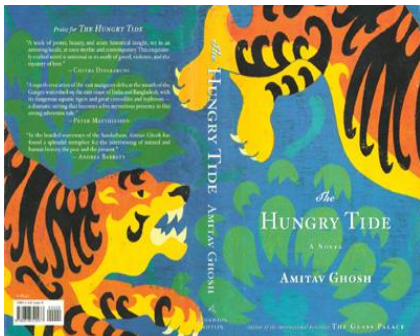
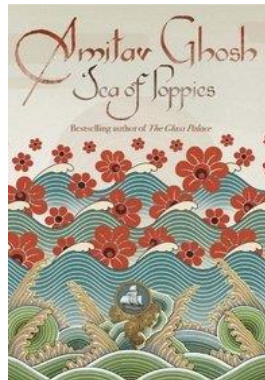
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3. Study multi-word verbs in the following sentences. Determine their types and meanings.

1. He hurried off to his school...
2. ... and the teacher ... took out a set of papers...
3. He tossed the papers into the wastebasket ...
4. Then the pupils rushed at him ... demanding that he shut up.
5. Then they tied him up with ropes ...

For further reading on modern Arabic literature refer to: <https://arablit.org/>

Unit 5



Indian Literature

In this unit you will read:

- A Newspaper Article About Narayan
- R.K.Narayan *Like the Sun*
- Amitav Ghosh
- Amitav Ghosh *The Hungry Tide*

R.K.Narayan: Biography

He was never much of a self-publicist. "Everyone thinks he's a writer with a mission," Mr. Narayan once told N. Ram. "Myself, absolutely not. I write only because I'm interested in a type of character, and I'm amused mostly by the seriousness with which each man takes himself."(New York Times 2001)

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Ayyar Narayanaswami famously known as R.K. Narayan (1906-2001) is one of the greatest Indian writers in English. He was one among many siblings, his father a provincial head-master. Narayan studied at his father's school and maintained a diligent dislike for studies. Narayan served his time in the university and graduated. Though the repugnance to studies never recouped he queued for the Master of Arts course, viewing the degree as an expedient in job hunting.



His writing career began with "Swami and Friends". He published a continuous stream of novels, all set in "Malgudi" and each dealing with different characters in that fictional place. Autobiographical content formed a significant part of some of his

novels. For example, the events surrounding the death of his young wife and how he coped with the loss form the basis of “The English Teacher”. Characters in his novels were very ordinary down-to-earth Indians trying to blend the tradition with modernization, often resulting in tragic-comic situations. His writings style was simple, unpretentious and witty-conveyed, with a unique flavour as if he were writing in the native tongue. Many of Narayan`s works are rooted in everyday life, though he is not shy of invoking Hindu tales or traditional Indian folklore to emphasize a point. His easy-going outlook on life has sometimes been criticized, though in general he is viewed as an accomplished, sensitive and reasonably prolific writer.

He won numerous awards and honors for his works. He won the National Prize of the Sahitya Akademi, the Indian literary academy, for *The Guide* in 1958. He was honoured with the Padma Bhushan, a coveted Indian award, for distinguished service to literature in 1964. In 1980, the Royal Society of Literature awarded the AC Benson Medal R. K. Narayan. He was an honorary member of the society. He was elected an honorary member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1982 and nominated to the Rajya Sabha in 1989. In addition, the University of Mysore, Delhi University and the University of Leeds conferred honorary doctorates on him.

A Newspaper Article About R.K.Narayan

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Before You Read

1. Consider collocations you will find in the article. Make sure you understand their meanings. Use the dictionary if necessary.

- bare necessity
- a voracious reader
- a steely character
- a firm arrangement
- a prolific walker

2. Explain the meaning of the following phrases. Use the dictionary if necessary.

- he made a career out of it.
- I was struggling at photojournalism ...
- People's attention will be distracted from your photographs...

3. “An interesting fact about him is that Narayan failed in English in the university exams and lost an academic year. In that one year, when there was no need for him to attend classes, he used to sit on a granite bench by the lake in Mysore and became a voracious reader of English poetry, Tagore and what not. And one year later, he had mastered the language.” What are other ways to improve language skills except reading? What way do you prefer?

Read the article from the newspaper about R.K.Narayan. What does it say about R.K.Narayan, the person?

Narayan put English writing up on a pedestal

My friendship with R K Narayan lasted more than 60 years. I knew him since my student days. When I was struggling to be a feature writer, he inspired me as a role model.

Narayan started his career when Indian writers in English could not earn a livelihood. They could not even get the bare necessities of life. And he made a career out of it. When I look back, I feel that Narayan, with his modesty, was a steely character to have overcome all those difficulties.

I remember, he got Rs 10 for his first contribution, a short story which he had sent to a magazine called Merry published from Madras in the 1930s. The story was about an eight-year-old boy who wanted to earn some pocket money to wander around the city and buy peanuts for munching. But his parents do not give him permission to do so. That story was called 'Dodo'. I think that name is a pet name of his younger brother R K Laxman, the well-known cartoonist. I remember, I was struggling at photojournalism and writing in the early 1940s. At that time there was no one in Mysore who could help me. It was Narayan who helped me.

He was senior to me by 18 years, but once he befriended me he spoke to me as an equal. In fact, he could talk to anyone as an equal if he befriended him. Another good point about him was that once he spotted a talent, he used to go all out to encourage the talent.

He was a prolific walker. He used to walk the streets of Mysore, enjoying everything. He was like a child looking at the world with wonder and innocence. He always loved to share company. He was not a loner. He always loved to be with people. His house in Mysore was open anytime for those who knew him. He was at his best conversing with people, especially in small groups.

Interestingly, he did not have any fixed time for writing. He didn't come to a firm arrangement with fixed times even in his last days. Whenever he felt like writing he used to start. If he had to sit at a friend's place for longer time and some idea struck him, he would start his work.

The interesting part of his writing was that if others took 10 words to write a sentence he would describe that beautifully in five words. And he never used a mechanical device to write. He would always write with a fountain pen. He used to write, rewrite, through unlimited papers in dustbin and after the final version only he used to sit for typing.

I last met him a year and four months ago during my exhibition of photographs. Despite his friendship, he could not come to the gallery for fear that people will mob him. "People's attention will be distracted from your photographs and that's why I will send my son-in-law to attend the function."

An interesting fact about him is that Narayan failed in English in the university exams and lost an academic year. In that one year, when there was no need for him to

attend classes, he used to sit on a granite bench by the lake in Mysore and became a voracious reader of English poetry, Tagore and what not. And one year later, he had mastered the language.

I think Narayan completed his task with glory. His job was to put up English writing on a pedestal. He along with Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand formed the trinity of English writing in India.

Narayan was an extraordinarily simple man, always wearing a dhoti and very rarely a suit. He was always comfortable in dhoti and used to eat frugal meals. Another thing is that he took criticism very straight and was not sentimental. He never wanted to get into political or ideological controversies. He remained a storyteller all his life. And his writing was such that he was read with interest by people of every age group.

(T.S. Satyan, well-known photographer and a personal friend of R K Narayan, spoke to Syed Firdaus Ashraf on telephone from Mysore.)



While reading try to catch the philosophy of the author in the story and pay attention to the style of his writing.

R.K.Narayan: “Like the Sun”

Truth, Sekhar reflected, is like the sun. I suppose no human being can ever look it straight in the face without blinking or being dazed. He realized that, morning till night, the essence of human relationships consisted in tempering truth so that it might not shock. This day he set apart as unique day – at least one day in a year we must give and take absolute Truth whatever may happen. Otherwise life is not worth living. The day ahead seemed to him full of possibilities. He told no one of his experiment. It was a quiet resolve, a secret past between him and eternity.

The very first test came while his wife served him his morning meal. He showed hesitation over a tit-bit, which she had thought was her culinary masterpiece. She asked, “Why, isn’t it good?” At other times he would have said, considering her feelings in the matter, “I feel full-up, that’s all.” But today he said, “It isn’t good. I’m unable to swallow it.” He saw her wince and said to himself, “Can’t be helped. Truth is like the sun.”

His next trial was in the common room when one of his colleagues came up and said, “Did you hear of the death of so and so? Don’t you think it a pity?” “No,” Sekhar answered. “He was such a fine man...” the other began. But Sekhar cut him short with: “Far from it. He always struck me as a mean and selfish brute.”

During the last period when he was teaching geography for Form A, Sekhar received a note from the headmaster: “Please see me before you go home.” Sekhar said to himself: It must be about these horrible test papers. A hundred papers in the boys’ scrawls; he had shirked this work for weeks, feeling all the time as if a sword were hanging over his head.

The bell rang and the boys burst out of the class.

Sekhar paused for a moment outside the headmaster's room to button up his coat; that was another subject the headmaster always sermonized about.

He stepped in with a very polite "Good evening, sir."

The headmaster looked up at him in a very friendly manner and asked, "Are you free this evening?"

Sekhar replied, "Just some outing which I have promised the children at home..."

"Well, you can take them out another day. Come home with me now."

"Oh... yes, sir, certainly..." And then he added timidly, "Anything special, sir?"

"Yes," replied the headmaster, smiling to himself... "You didn't know my weakness for music?"

"Oh, yes, sir..."

"I've been learning and practicing secretly, and now I want you to hear me this evening. I've engaged a drummer and a violinist to accompany me- this is the first time I'm doing it full-dress and I want your opinion. I know it will be valuable."

Sekhar's taste in music was well known. He was one of the most dreaded music critics in the town. But he never anticipated his musical inclinations would lead him to this trail... "Rather a surprise for you isn't it?" asked the headmaster. "I've spent a fortune on it behind doors..." They started for the headmaster's house. "God hasn't given me a child, but at least let him not deny me of the consolation of music," the headmaster said, pathetically, as they walked. He incessantly chattered about how music: how he began one day out of sheer boredom; how his teacher at first laughed at him, and then gave him hope; how his ambition in life was to forget himself in music.

At home the headmaster proved very ingratiating. He sat Sekhar on a red silk carpet, set before him several dishes of delicacies, and fussed over him as if he were a son-in-law of the house. He even said, "Well, you must listen with a free mind. Don't worry about these test papers." He added humorously, "I will give you a week's time."

"Make it ten days, sir," Sekhar pleaded.

"All right, granted," the headmaster said generously. Sekhar felt really relieved now- he would attack them at the rate of ten a day and get rid of the nuisance.

The headmaster lighted incense sticks. 'Just to create the right atmosphere.' He explained. A drummer and a violinist, already seated on a Rangoon mat, were waiting for him. The headmaster sat down between them like a professional at a concert, cleared his throat, and began an alapana, and paused to ask, "Isn't it good Kalyani?" Sekhar pretended not to have heard the question. The headmaster went on to sing a full song composed by Thyagaraja and followed it by two more. All the time the headmaster was singing, Sekhar went on commenting within himself, 'He croaks like a dozen frogs. He is bellowing like a buffalo. Now he sounds like loose window shutters in a storm.'

The incense sticks burnt low. Sekhar's head throbbed with the medley of sounds that had assailed his ear-drums for a couple of hours now. He felt half

stupefied. The headmaster had gone nearly hoarse, when he paused to ask, "Shall I go on?" Sekhar felt greatest pity for him. But he felt he could not help it. No judge delivering a sentence felt more pained and helpless. Sekhar noticed that the headmaster's wife peeped in from the kitchen, with eager curiosity. The drummer and the violinist put away their burdens with an air of relief. The headmaster removed his spectacles, mopped his brow, and asked, "Now, come out with your opinion."

"Can't I give it tomorrow, sir?" Sekhar asked tentatively.

"No. I want it immediately- your frank opinion. Was it good?"

"No, sir..." Sekhar replied.

"Oh! ...Is there any use continuing my lessons?"

"Absolutely none, sir..." Sekhar said with his voice trembling. He felt very unhappy that he could not speak more soothingly. Truth, he reflected, required as much strength to give as to receive.

All the way home he felt worried. He felt that his official life was not going to be smooth sailing hereafter. There were questions of increment and confirmation and so on, all depending upon the headmaster's goodwill. All kinds of worries seemed to be in store for him... Did not Harischandra lose his throne, wife, child, because he would speak nothing less than the absolute Truth whatever happened?

At home his wife served him with a sullen face. He knew she was still angry with him for his remark of the morning. Two casualties for today, Sekhar said to himself. If I practice it for a week, I don't think I shall have a single friend left.

He received a call from the headmaster in his classroom next day. He went up apprehensively.

"Your suggestion was useful. I have paid off the music master. No one would tell me the truth about my music all these days. Why such antics at my age! Thank you. By the way, what about those test papers?"

"You gave me ten days, sir, for correcting them."

"Oh, I've reconsidered it. I must positively have them here tomorrow..." A hundred papers in a day! That meant all night's sitting up! "Give me a couple of days, sir..."

"No. I must have them tomorrow morning. And remember, every paper must be thoroughly scrutinized."

"Yes, sir," Sekhar said, feeling that sitting up all night with a hundred test papers was a small price to pay for the luxury of practicing Truth.

After You Read

1. Think about the plot of the story:

1. Why did Sekhar call the day unique? What did he decide to do on the day?
2. Who became the first person to suffer the test?
3. Who was the third victim of his test?
4. Was Sekhar unhappy after receiving a note from his headmaster?
5. What was the reason of Sekhar's visit to the headmaster's place?
6. How did the headmaster treat Sekhar at his place?

7. Did Sekhar speak soothingly expressing his own opinion about the headmaster's singing?
8. Was the headmaster's reaction on receiving the negative characteristic of his singing?
9. Should we hold our frank opinion or express it without thinking about consequences?
10. Comment the expression "Truth required as much strength to give as to receive?"
11. Do you sympathize both characters? Who was a sufferer?
12. Who is the narrator of the story? Whose side does the author support?
13. Are there the examples of the inner voice of the characters?
14. Find sentences with the comparative constructions and analyze them.
15. Write down adjectives from the text and divide them into such groups: positive, negative and neutral. Analyze the formation of these adjectives and name their suffixes.

2. Find synonyms in the text to the following unit:

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| ▪ -to be dazed | ▪ -to sermonize |
| ▪ -to consider | ▪ -to tremble |
| ▪ -to receive | |

3. Explain these words in English and make up your own sentences:

- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| ▪ -to scrutinize | ▪ -assail |
| ▪ curiosity | ▪ -to temper |
| ▪ -to stupefy | ▪ -to blink |
| ▪ -incessant | |

4. Write down the translation of the following units and make up sentences with them:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ▪ -to begin smth out of sheer boredom | ▪ -to fuss over smth |
| ▪ -to be worth doing | ▪ -let smb not deny smth |
| ▪ to shirk one's work | ▪ -to go to do smth |
| ▪ -to hang over one's head | ▪ to peep in |
| | ▪ to get rid of smth |

5. Translate sentences and explain the underline parts from the point of grammar:

1. He saw her wince and said to himself.
2. He was such a fine man.
3. The headmaster looked up at him in a very friendly manner and asked.
4. The headmaster had gone nearly hoarse when he paused to ask.
5. He removed his spectacles, mopped his brow and asked.
6. But he felt he could not help it.
7. If I practice it for a weak, I don't think I'll have a single friend left.
8. He felt half stupefied. All the way home he felt worried.

6. Read and translate the sentence:

a) Did not Harischandra lose his throne, wife, child, because he would speak nothing less than the absolute Truth whatever happened?

b) Are you ready to tell only the absolute Truth in your everyday life? Is it worth losing everything in order to tell the truth?

c) Who was Harischandra?

d) Read the Legend of Harishchandra's ideal life:

Harishchandra, in Hindu mythology is the 28th king of the Solar Dynasty. His legend is very popular and often told as a **benchmark** for an ideal life. He was renowned for his **piety** and justice. His name is Sanskrit for "having golden splendour". Harishchandra had two unique qualities. The first being, he kept his word and never went back on what he **uttered** as a promise. The other being, he never uttered a lie in his life. These twin qualities were tested heavily in his life by various circumstances that led him to **penury** and separation from his family. But he stood to his principles in the face of all ordeals and persevered to become a symbol of courage.

It is said that the great sage Vishwamitra, once approached Harishchandra and informed him of a promise made by the king during the sage's dream to donate his entire kingdom. (Accounts differ on how the sage had got the promise from the king. Some other legends say, it was by way of pacification when the king had once disturbed the sage's penance to his consternation.) Harishchandra was so **virtuous**, that he immediately made good his word and donated his entire kingdom to the sage and walked away with his wife and son.

Since, the entire world was under the sage after he donated his kingdom; the king had to go to Benares, a holy town dedicated to Lord Shiva. This was now the only place outside the influence of the sage. But the sage proclaimed that for an act of donation to be completed, an additional amount as Dakshina (honorarium) had to be paid. Harishchandra, with no money in his hands, had to sell his wife and son to a Brahmin Grihastha to pay for the Dakshina. When the money collected still did not suffice for the purpose, he sold himself to a guard at the cremation ground, who was in charge of collecting taxes for the bodies to be cremated.

The king, his wife and son had to **sustain** tremendous hardships doing their respective chores. The king helped the guard cremate the dead bodies, while his wife and son were used as household helpers at the house of the Brahmin. Once, the son had been to the garden to **pluck** flowers for his master's prayer, when he was bitten by a snake and he died instantly. His mother, having nobody to sympathise for her, carried his body to the cremation grounds. In acute penury, she could not even pay the taxes needed to cremate him. Harishchandra did not recognise his wife and son. He asked the lady to sell her golden **mangalashtra** and pay the tax. It is at this instance that his wife recognises the man as her husband. She has a **boon** that her husband only could see her mangalashtra. Harishchandra then came to her and recognised her as his wife and was stung by pangs of agony.

But Harishchandra was dutybound by his job to perform the cremation only after the acceptance of the tax. So, he asked his wife, if she was willing to undergo

further hardships and stand by him in this hour of calamity. The faithful wife readily gave **assent**. She had in her possession only a saree, a part of which was used to cover the dead body of her son. She offers half of her lone dress as the tax, which Harishchandra could accept and perform the last **rites** of his son. When she proceeded to remove her dress, miracles happened.

Lord Vishnu, Indra and all Devas and the sage Vishwamitra himself manifested themselves on the scene, and praised Harishchandra for his perseverance and **steadfastness**. They brought his son back to life. They also offered the king and his wife, instant places in heaven. The virtuous king refused saying that he cannot leave behind his subjects, by Kshatriya Dharma. He asked for a place in heaven for all his subjects. But the gods refused explaining that the subjects had their own Karma and they have to undergo them. The king was then ready to forego all his virtues and religiousness for his people, so that they could ascend to heaven leaving him behind. The gods, now immensely pleased with the unassailable character of the great king, offered heavenly **abode** to the king, the queen and all their subjects.

The sage Vishwamitra helped to populate the kingdom again and installed Harishchandra's son as the king.

This moving story affected one of the greatest men of the 19th-20th century, Mahatma Gandhi who was deeply influenced by the virtues of telling the truth when he watched the play of Harishchandra in his childhood.

e) Write down the translation of the words in bold.

f) Retell the legend to you groupmates. What impression has the legend made on you? Have you read/heard any similar legends?

Amitav Ghosh: Biography



“Amitav Ghosh has established himself as one of the finest prose writers of his generation of Indian writing in English” - Financial Times. He weaves ‘indo-nostalgic’ elements in his unique and personal topics enriched with heavier themes. Overlapped in part with post-colonialism his fictions are attributed by strong themes.

Amitav Ghosh was born in 1956 in Calcutta. He grew up in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Iran and India. He went to Oxford to study Social Anthropology after graduating from University of Delhi. Amitav Ghosh received a Master of Philosophy and awarded a Ph.D. in 1982. He lives in New York with his wife and his children. His wife, Deborah Baker is the author of "In Extremis: The life of Laura Riding" and senior editor at Little, Brown and Co.

Amitav Ghosh joined as Distinguished Professor in Comparative Literature, the faculty at Queens Collage in the City University of New York in 1999. Since 2005 he has also been visiting professor of Harvard University to the English department. He has been a journalist too.

Amitav Ghosh published his first novel "The Circle of Reason" and the second one "The Shadow Lines" in 1986 and 1988. He wrote "In an Antique Land" in 1993 as a result of his visit to Egypt to do field work in the Fellaheen village of Lataifa in 1980. Since then "The Calcutta Chromosome" in 1995 and "The Glass Place" in 2000 had published. "The Hungry Tide" is his latest work on fiction. It was published in 2004. He won India's most prestigious literary award the 'Sahitya Akademi Award' for his "The Shadow Lines" in the English language category. The novel focuses on the family of the narrator in Calcutta and Dhaka and their connection with an English family in London. "The Calcutta Chromosome" won the 'Arthur C. Clarke award' in 1997. The novel has been described as a kind of mystery thriller.

Apart from fiction Amitav Ghosh is also involved with writing non-fiction. "Countdown" is a book on India's nuclear Policy and is one of his major work in non-fiction. His Other work in non-fiction includes "The Imam and the Indians" - a collection of essays on various topics such as history of the novel, Egyptian culture and literature; and "Dancing in Combodia, At Large in Burma". He was awarded the prestigious "Padmashree Award" by Government of India in 20th June 2007. Penguin, India has also awarded his proposed work on trilogy.

Amitav Ghosh's work is not easy to label. His works are attributed with strong themes but are not formulaic. His work which is braided with postcolonialism and Indo-nostalgic elements established this writer and journalist as one of the finest writer of his generation.

Before You Read

1. You are going to read the interview with Amitav Ghosh in which the author will tell us about his novel "The Tide Country". Read these sentences and express your own point of view. **"I think the world has been globalizing for a long time. It is not a new phenomenon, but one that has achieved a new kind of intensity in recent years"**.
2. Read the following expressions, explain what they mean. Why are they so often discussed in the world?

the crucial sense

the emergent culture

the cultural gap

a precarious existence

a shallow communication

a cultural interaction

3. Insert the prepositions in the sentences and check them with the text below.

As a writer, thinkingto the birth of the novel, it really coincidesthe development of monolingual cultures in Europe, which is also a fairly new

phenomenon. It is only since the beginning of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries that you have people who only spoke German, as opposedLatin and German, or similarly, French, English or whatever. The decline of dialects happenedexactly the same time.

Interview with Mr. Ghosh

Mr. Ghosh spoke with Hasan Ferdous and Horst Rutsch of the UN Chronicle on the occasion of the publication of his most recent novel “The Hungry Tide”.

On literature in a globalized world

I think the world has been globalizing for a long time. It is not a new phenomenon, but one that has achieved a new kind of intensity in recent years. The only real barrier to a complete uniformity around the world is not the image but the language. Images can be exchanged between cultures, but the domain where globalization has truly been resisted is that of language. We can send e-mails, which can be instantly translated, but that is shallow communication. For any kind of deeper, resonant communication, language is essential. All such communication is always deeply embedded in language.

As a writer, thinking back to the birth of the novel, it really coincides with the development of monolingual cultures in Europe, which is also a fairly new phenomenon. It is only since about the beginning of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries that you have people who only spoke German, as opposed to Latin and German, or similarly, French, English or whatever. The decline of dialects happened at exactly the same time. So the novel coincides with the rise of monolingualism. I remember when I first started writing, the comments I would get in Europe were, “what you are doing is very peculiar because you are writing in languages other than those you spoke at home”. I think that is true. It is also true that writers like me have been pioneers. Everybody is going to have to deal with multilinguality and interlingual communication. The old monolingual worlds are in some way not the same as they used to be; that is why translation is such an important part of this book. I feel that this is the crucial sense in which writers are figures in the emergent culture we see ahead. In a text like mine [The Hungry Tide], you see the possibility of deep communication, which you would not see in films or in any kind of image-based representation.

On exploring cultural gaps

I find history completely absorbing and fascinating. I’m always interested to discover aspects of history; it adds a kind of richness to one’s experience of a place. Speaking about history, one of the very important things in a text is that it becomes a place where those cultural interactions are performed in the most difficult possible ways. The two central characters in my book can’t speak to each other. Yet I feel it is exactly that form of cultural gap that you have to explore. Someone who has

experienced non-communication must try to represent it in some sort of truthful or interesting way.

“The Hungry Tide” is set in the extensive archipelago of tiny islands and labyrinthian waterways known as the Sundarbans. Stretching from India to Bangladesh, this little-known tide country offers no visible borders between the river and the sea, and sometimes not even between land and water. In this desolate and mysterious place of mangroves and mudflats, the poor villagers lead a precarious existence. The Hungry Tide involves Piya, a young Indian-American cetologist, who has come to the Sundarbans to study a rare species of the river dolphin. There, she meets Kanai, a Bengali businessman living in Delhi, who acts as her translator, and Fokir, an illiterate fisherman, who guides her through the dangerous waters. The novel dynamically weaves their stories together with the environmental and political history of this isolated region.

While reading pay your attention to the narration of the story. What stylistic devices were used to describe surroundings?



“THE HUNGRY TIDE”
By Amitav Ghosh
The Tide Country

Kanai spotted her the moment he stepped onto the crowded platform: he was deceived neither by her close-cropped black hair, nor by her clothes, which were those of a teenage boy - loose cotton pants and an oversized white shirt. Winding unerringly through the snack-vendors and tea-sellers who were hawking their wares on the station's platform, his eyes settled on her slim, shapely figure. Her face was long and narrow, with an elegance of line markedly at odds with the severity of her haircut. There was no *bindi* on her forehead and her arms were free of bangles and bracelets, but on one of her ears was a silver stud, glinting brightly against the sun-deepened darkness of her skin.

Kanai liked to think that he had the true connoisseur's ability to both praise and appraise women, and he was intrigued by the way she held herself, by the unaccustomed delineation of her stance. It occurred to him suddenly that perhaps, despite her silver ear-stud and the tint of her skin, she was not Indian, except by descent. And the moment the thought occurred to him, he was convinced of it: she was a foreigner; it was stamped in her posture, in the way she stood, balancing on her heels like a flyweight boxer, with her feet planted apart. Among a crowd of college girls on Kolkata's Park Street she might not have looked entirely out of place, but here, against the sooty backdrop of the commuter station at Dhakuria, the neatly composed androgyny of her appearance seemed out of place, almost exotic.

Why would a foreigner, a young woman, be standing in a south Kolkata commuter station, waiting for the train to Canning?

It was true of course that this line was the only rail connection to the Sundarbans. But so far as he knew it was never used by tourists - the few who travelled in that direction usually went by boat, hiring steamers or launches on Kolkata's riverfront. The train was mainly used by people who did *daily-passengeri*, coming in from outlying villages to work in the city.

He saw her turning to ask something of a bystander and was seized by an urge to listen in. Language was both his livelihood and his addiction and he was often preyed upon by a near-irresistible compulsion to eavesdrop on conversations in public places. Pushing his way through the crowd he arrived within earshot just in time to hear her finish a sentence that ended with the words 'train to Canning?' One of the onlookers began to explain, gesticulating with an upraised arm. But the explanation was in Bengali and it was lost on her. She stopped the man with a raised hand and said, in apology, that she knew no Bengali: *ami Bangia jani na*. He could tell from the awkwardness of her pronunciation that this was literally true: like strangers everywhere, she had learnt just enough of the language to be able to provide due warning of her incomprehension.

Kanai was the one other 'outsider' on the platform and he quickly attracted his own share of attention. He was of medium height and at the age of forty-two his hair, which was still thick, had begun to show a few streaks of grey at the temples. In the tilt of his head, as in the width of his stance, there was a quiet certainty, an indication of a well-grounded belief in his ability to prevail, in most circumstances. Although his face was otherwise unlined, his eyes had fine wrinkles fanning out from their edges - but these grooves, by heightening the mobility of his face, emphasized more his youth than his age. Although he was once slight of build, his waist had thickened over the years but he still carried himself lightly, and with an alertness bred of the traveller's instinct for inhabiting the moment.

It so happened that Kanai was carrying a wheeled airline bag with a telescoping handle. To the vendors and travelling salesmen who plied their wares on the Canning line, this piece of luggage was just one of the many details of Kanai's appearance - along with his sunglasses, corduroy trousers and suede shoes - that suggested middle-aged prosperity and metropolitan affluence. As a result he was besieged by hawkers, urchins and bands of youths who were raising funds for a varied assortment of causes: it was only when the green-and-yellow electric train finally pulled in that he was able to shake off this importuning entourage.

While climbing in, he noticed that the foreign girl was not without some experience in travel: she hefted her two huge backpacks herself, brushing aside the half-dozen porters who were hovering around her. There was a strength in her limbs that belied her diminutive size and wispy build; she swung the backpacks into the compartment with practised ease and pushed her way through a crowd of milling passengers. Briefly he wondered whether he ought to tell her

that there was a special compartment for women. But she was swept inside and he lost sight of her.

Then the whistle blew and Kanai breasted the crowd himself. On stepping in he glimpsed a seat and quickly lowered himself into it. He had been planning to do some reading on this trip and in trying to get his papers out of his suitcase it struck him that the seat he had found was not altogether satisfactory. There was not enough light to read by and to his right there was a woman with a wailing baby: he knew it would be hard to concentrate if he had to fend off a pair of tiny flying fists. It occurred to him, on reflection that the seat on his left was preferable to his own, being right beside the window - the only problem was that it was occupied by a man immersed in a Bengali newspaper. Kanai took a moment to size up the newspaper reader and saw that he was an elderly and somewhat subdued-looking person, someone who might well be open to a bit of persuasion.

'*Are moshai*, can I just say a word?' Kanai smiled as he bore down on his neighbour with the full force of his persuasiveness. 'If it isn't all that important to you, would you mind changing places with me? I have a lot of work to do and the light is better by the window.'

The newspaper reader goggled in astonishment and for a moment it seemed he might even protest or resist. But on taking in Kanai's clothes and all the other details of his appearance, he underwent a change of mind: this was dearly someone with a long reach, someone who might be on familiar terms with policemen, politicians and others of importance. Why court trouble? He gave in gracefully and made way for Kanai to sit beside the window.

Kanai was pleased to have achieved his end without a fuss. Nodding his thanks to the newspaper reader, he resolved to buy him a cup of tea when a *cha'ala* next appeared at the window. Then he reached into the outer flap of his suitcase and pulled out a few sheets of paper covered in closely written Bengali script. He smoothed the pages over his knees and began to read.

'In our legends it is said that the goddess Ganga's descent from the heavens would have split the earth had Lord Shiva not tamed her torrent by tying it into his ashsmearred locks. To hear this story is to see the river in a certain way: as a heavenly braid, for instance, an immense rope of water, unfurling through a wide and thirsty plain. That there is a further twist to the tale becomes apparent only in the final stages of the river's journey - and this part of the story always comes as a surprise, because it is never told and thus never imagined. It is this: there is a point at which the braid comes undone; where Lord Shiva's matted hair is washed apart into a vast, knotted tangle. Once past that point the river throws off its bindings and separates into hundreds, maybe thousands, of tangled strands.

'Until you behold it for yourself, it is almost impossible to believe that here, interposed between the sea and the plains of Bengal, lies an immense archipelago of islands. But that is what it is: an archipelago, stretching for almost three hundred kilometres, from the Hooghly River in West Bengal to

the shores of the Meghna in Bangladesh.

'The islands are the trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringe of her sari, the *achol* that follows her, half-wetted by the sea. They number in the thousands, these islands; some are immense and some no larger than sandbars; some have lasted through recorded history while others were washed into being just a year or two ago. These islands are the rivers' restitution, the offerings through which they return to the earth what they have taken from it, but in such a form as to assert their permanent dominion over their gift. The rivers' channels are spread across the land like a fine-mesh net, creating a terrain where the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable. Some of these channels are mighty waterways, so wide across that one shore is invisible from the other; others are no more than two or three kilometres long and only a few hundred metres across. Yet, each of these channels is a 'river' in its own right, each possessed of its own strangely evocative name. When these channels meet, it is often in dusters of four, five or even six: at these confluences, the water stretches to the far edges of the landscape and the forest dwindles into a distant rumour of land, echoing back from the horizon. In the language of the place, such a confluence is spoken of as a *mohona* - an oddly seductive word, wrapped in many layers of beguilement.

'There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometres inland and every day thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater, only to re-emerge hours later. The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily - some days the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas; at other times it throws up new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before.

'When the tides create new land, overnight mangroves begin to gestate, and if the conditions are right they can spread so fast as to cover a new island within a few short years. A mangrove forest is a universe unto itself, utterly unlike other woodlands or jungles. There are no towering, vine-looped trees, no ferns, no wildflowers, no chattering monkeys or cockatoos. Mangrove leaves are tough and leathery, the branches gnarled and the foliage often impassably dense. Visibility is short and the air still and fetid. At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain's hostility to their presence, of its cunning and resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them. Every year, dozens of people perish in the embrace of that dense foliage, killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles.

'There is no prettiness here to invite the stranger in: yet, to the world at large this archipelago is known as "the Sundarban", which means, "the beautiful forest". There are some who believe the word to be derived from the name of a common species of mangrove - the *sundari* tree, *Heritiera minor*. But the word's origin is no easier to account for than is its present prevalence, for in the record books of the Mughal emperors this region is named not in reference to a tree but to a tide - *bhati*. And to the inhabitants of the islands this land is

known as *bhatir desh* - the tide country - except that *bhati* is not just the "tide" but one tide in particular, the ebb-tide, the *bhata*. This is a land half-submerged at high tide: it is only in *falling* that the water gives birth to the forest. To look upon this strange parturition, midwived by the moon, is to know why the name "tide country" is not just right but necessary. For as with Rilke's catkins hanging from the hazel and the spring rain upon the dark earth, when we behold the lowering tide

*'we, who have always thought of joy
as rising ... feel the emotion
that almost amazes us
when a happy thing falls.'*

An Invitation

The train was at a standstill, some twenty minutes outside Kolkata, when an unexpected stroke of luck presented Piya with an opportunity to avail herself of a seat beside a window. She had been sitting in the stuffiest part of the compartment, on the edge of a bench, with her backpacks arrayed around her: now, moving to the window, she saw that the train had stopped at a station called Champahati. A platform sloped down into a huddle of hutments before sinking into a pond filled with foaming grey sludge. She could tell, from the density of the crowds on the train that this was how it would be all the way to Canning: strange to think that this was the threshold of the Sundarbans, this jungle of shacks and shanties, spanned by the tracks of a commuter train.

Looking over her shoulder, Piya spotted a tea-seller patrolling the platform. Reaching through the bars, she summoned him with a wave. She had never cared for the kind of *chai* sold in Seattle, her hometown, but somehow, in the ten days she had spent in India she had developed an unexpected affinity for milky, overboiled tea served in earthenware cups. There were no spices in it for one thing, and this was more to her taste than the *chai* at home.

She paid for her tea and was trying to manoeuvre the cup through the bars of the window when the man in the seat opposite her own suddenly flipped over a page, jolting her hand. She turned her wrist quickly enough to make sure that most of the tea spilled out of the window, but she could not prevent a small trickle from shooting over his papers.

'Oh, I'm so sorry!' Piya was mortified: of everyone in the compartment, this was the last person she would have chosen to scald with her tea. She had noticed him while waiting on the platform in Kolkata and she had been struck by the self-satisfied tilt of his head and the unabashed way in which he stared at everyone around him, taking them in, sizing them up, sorting them all into their places. She had noticed the casual self-importance with which he had evicted the man who'd been sitting next to the window. She had been put in mind of some of her relatives in Kolkata: they too seemed to share the assumption that they had been granted some kind of entitlement (was it because of their class or their education?) that allowed them to expect that

life's little obstacles and annoyances would always be swept away to suit their convenience.

'Here,' said Piya, producing a handful of tissues. 'Let me help you clean up.'

'There's nothing to be done,' he said testily. 'These pages are ruined anyway.'

She flinched as he crumpled up the papers he had been reading and tossed them out of the window. 'I hope they weren't important,' she said in a small voice.

'Nothing irreplaceable - just Xeroxes:

For a moment she considered pointing out that it was he who had jogged her hand. But all she could bring herself to say was, 'I'm very sorry. I hope you'll excuse me.'

'Do I really have a choice?' he said in a tone more challenging than ironic. 'Does anyone have a choice when they're dealing with Americans these days?'

Piya had no wish to get into an argument so she let this pass. Instead she opened her eyes wide, feigning admiration, and said, 'But how did you guess?'

'About what?'

'About my being American? You're very observant.'

This seemed to mollify him. His shoulders relaxed as he leaned back in his seat. 'I didn't guess,' he said. 'I *knew*.'

'And how did you know?' she said. 'Was it my accent?'

'Yes,' he said with a nod. 'I'm very rarely wrong about accents. I'm a translator you see, and an interpreter as well, by profession. I like to think that my ears are tuned to the nuances of spoken language.'

'Oh really?' She smiled so that her teeth shone brightly in the dark oval of her face. 'And how many languages do you know?'

'Six. Not including dialects.'

'Wow!' Her admiration was unfeigned now. 'I'm afraid English is my only language. And I wouldn't claim to be much good at it either.'

A frown of puzzlement appeared on his forehead. 'And you're on your way to Canning you said?'

'Yes.'

'But tell me this,' he said. 'If you don't know any Bengali or Hindi, how are you planning to find your way around over there?'

'I'll do what I usually do,' she said with a laugh. 'I'll try to wing it. Anyway, in my line of work there's not much talk needed.'

'And what is your line of work, if I may ask?'

'I'm a cetologist,' she said. 'That means -' She was beginning, almost apologetically, to expand on this when he interrupted her.

'I know what it means: he said sharply. 'You don't need to explain. It means you study marine mammals. Right?'

'Yes,' she said, nodding. 'You're very well informed. Marine mammals are what I study - dolphins, whales, dugongs and so on. My work takes me out

on the water for days sometimes, with no one to talk to - no one who speaks English, anyway.'

'So is it your work that takes you to Canning?'

'That's right. I'm hoping to wangle a permit to do a survey of the marine mammals of the Sundarbans.'

For once he was silenced, although only briefly. 'I'm amazed,' he said presently. 'I didn't even know there were any such.'

'Oh yes, there are,' she said. 'Or there used to be, anyway. Very large numbers of them.'

'Really? All we ever hear about is the tigers and the crocodiles.'

'I know,' she said. 'The cetacean population has kind of disappeared from view. No one knows whether it's because they're gone or because they haven't been studied. There hasn't ever been a proper survey.'

'And why's that?'

'Maybe because it's impossible to get permission?' she said. 'There was a team here last year. They prepared for months, sent in their papers and everything. But they didn't even make it out on the water. Their permits were withdrawn at the last minute.'

'And why do you think you'll fare any better?'

'It's easier to slip through the net if you're on your own,' she said. There was a brief pause and then, with a tight-lipped smile, she added, 'Besides, I have an uncle in Kolkata who's a big wheel in the government. He's spoken to someone in the Forest Department's office in Canning. I'm keeping my fingers crossed:

'I see.' He seemed to be impressed as much by her candour as her canniness. 'So you have relatives in Calcutta then?'

'Yes. In fact I was born there myself, although my parents left when I was just a year old.' She turned a sharp glance on him, raising an eyebrow. 'I see you still say "Calcutta". My father does that too.'

Kanai acknowledged the correction with a nod. 'You're right - I should be more careful, but the re-naming was so recent that I do get confused sometimes. I try to reserve "Calcutta" for the past and "Kolkata" for the present but occasionally I slip. Especially when I'm speaking English.' He smiled and put out a hand. 'I should introduce myself; I'm Kanai Dutt.'

'And I'm Piyali Roy - but everyone calls me Piya.'

She could tell he was surprised by the unmistakably Bengali sound of her name: evidently her ignorance of the language had given him the impression that her family's origins lay in some other part of India.

'You have a Bengali name,' he said, raising an eyebrow. 'And yet you know no Bangla?'

'It's not my fault really,' she said quickly, her voice growing defensive. 'I grew up in Seattle. I was so little when I left India that I never had a chance to learn.'

'By that token, having grown up in Calcutta, I should speak no English.'

'Except that I just happen to be terrible at languages.' She let the sentence

trail away, unfinished, and then changed the subject. 'And what brings *you* to Canning, Mr Dutt?'

'Kanai - call me Kanai.'

'Kan-ay.'

He was quick to correct her when she stumbled over the pronunciation: 'Say it to rhyme with Hawaii:

'Kanai?'

'Yes, that's right. And to answer your question - I'm on my way to visit an aunt of mine.'

'She lives in Canning?'

'No,' he said. 'She lives in a place called Lusibari. It's quite a long way from Canning.'

'Where exactly?' Piya unzipped a pocket in one of her backpacks and pulled out a map. 'Show me. On this.'

Kanai spread the map out and used a fingertip to trace a winding line through the tidal channels and waterways. 'Canning is the railhead for the Sundarbans,' he said, 'and Lusibari is the farthest of the inhabited islands. It's a long way upriver - you have to go past Annpur, Jamespur and Emilybari. And there it is: Lusibari.'

Piya knitted her eyebrows as she looked at the map. 'Strange names.'

'You'd be surprised how many places in the Sundarbans have names that come from English,' Kanai said. 'Lusibarl just means "Lucy's House".'

'Lucy's House?' Piya looked up in surprise. 'As in the name "Lucy"?' 155

'Yes.' A gleam came into his eyes and he said, 'You should come and visit the place. I'll tell you the story of how it got its name.'

'Is that an invitation?' Piya said smiling.

'Absolutely,' Kanai responded. 'Come. I'm inviting you. Your company will lighten the burden of my exile.'

Piya laughed. She had thought at first that Kanai was much too full of himself, but now she was inclined to be slightly more generous in her assessment: she had caught sight of a glimmer of irony somewhere that made his self-centredness appear a little more interesting than she had first imagined.

'But how would I find you?' she said. 'Where would I look?'

'Just make your way to the hospital in Lusibari,' said Kanai, 'and ask for "Mashima". They'll take you to my aunt and she'll know where I am.'

'Mashima?' said Piya. 'But I have a "Mashima" too -- doesn't it just mean "aunt"? There must be more than one aunt there: yours can't be the only one?'

'If you go to the hospital and ask for "Mashima",' said Kanai, 'everyone will know who you mean. My aunt founded it, you see, and she heads the organization that runs it - the Badabon Trust. She's a real personage on the island - everyone calls her "Mashima", even though her real name is Nilima Bose. They were quite a pair, she and her husband. People always called him "Saar" just as they call her "Mashirna".'

'Saar? And what does that mean?'

Kanai laughed. 'It's just a Bangla way of saying "Sir". He was the headmaster of the local school, you see, so all his pupils called him "Sir". In time people forgot he had a real name - Nirmal Bose.'

'I notice you're speaking of him in the past tense.'

'Yes. He's been dead a long time.' No sooner had he spoken than Kanai pulled a face, as if to disclaim what he had just said. 'But to tell you the truth, right now it doesn't feel like he's been gone a long time.'

'How come?'

'Because he's risen from his ashes to summon me.' Kanai said with a smile. 'You see, he'd left some papers for me at the time of his death. They'd been lost all these years, but now they've turned up again. That's why I'm on my way there: my aunt wanted me to come and look at them.'

Hearing a note of muted complaint in his voice, Piya said, 'It sounds as if you weren't too eager to go.'

'No, I wasn't, to be honest,' he said. 'I have a lot to attend to and this was a particularly busy time. It wasn't easy to take a week off.'

'Is this the first time you've come, then?' said Piya.

'No, it's not,' said Kanai, 'I was sent down here once, years ago.'

'Sent down? Why?'

'It's a story that involves the word "rusticate";' said Kanai with a smile. 'Are you familiar with it?'

'No. Can't say I am.'

'It was a punishment, dealt out to schoolboys who misbehaved,' said Kanai. 'They were sent off to suffer the company of rustics. As a boy I was of the opinion that I knew more about most things than my teachers did. There was an occasion once when I publicly humiliated a teacher who had the unfortunate habit of pronouncing the word "lion" as if it overlapped, in meaning as in rhyme, with the word "groin", I was about ten at the time. One thing led to another and my tutors persuaded my parents I had to be rusticated. I was sent off to stay with my aunt and uncle, in Lusibari.' He laughed at the memory. 'That was a long time ago, in 1970.'

The train had begun to slow down now and Kanai was interrupted by a sudden blast from the engine's horn. Glancing through the window, he spotted a yellow signboard that said, 'Canning'.

'We're there,' he said. He seemed suddenly regretful that their conversation had come to an end. Tearing off a piece of paper, he wrote a few words on it and pressed it into her hands. 'Here - this'll help you remember where to find me.'

The train had ground to a halt now and people were surging towards the doors of the compartment. Rising to her feet, Piya slung her backpacks over her shoulders. 'Maybe we'll meet again.'

'I hope so.' He raised a hand to wave. 'Be careful with the man-eaters.'

'Take care yourself. Goodbye.'

Fokir

Only after the launch had disappeared from view was Piya able to breathe freely again. But now, as her muscles loosened, the delayed shock she had been half-expecting set in as well. Her limbs began to quiver and all of a sudden her chin was knocking a drumbeat on her kneecaps; in a moment she was shivering hard enough to shake the boat, sending ripples across the water.

There was a touch on her shoulder and she turned sideways to see the child, standing beside her. He put his arm around her and clung to her back, hugging her, trying to warm her body with his own. She closed her eyes and did not open them again until the chattering of her teeth had stopped.

Now it was the fisherman who was in front of her, squatting on his haunches and looking into her face with an inquiring frown. Slowly, as her shivering passed, his face relaxed into a smile. With a finger on his chest, pointing at himself, he said, 'Fakir'. She understood that this was his name and responded with her own: 'Piya.' With a nod of acknowledgement, he turned to the boy and said, 'Tutul.' Then his forefinger moved, from himself to the boy and back again, and she knew he was telling her the boy was his son.

"Tutul."

Looking closely at the child she saw he was even younger than she had thought, perhaps no more than five years old. He was wearing a threadbare sweater, against the November chill. Below this hung a pair of huge, discoloured shorts that looked as though they had once belonged to a school uniform. He had something in his hands, and when he held it up she saw it was her laminated placard. She had no idea where he had found it but was pleased to see it again. He brought it to her, holding it in front of him like a tray, and gave her fingers a squeeze, as though to assure her of his protection.

The gesture had the paradoxical effect of making her aware of her own vulnerability. This was not a feeling she was accustomed to - she was used to being on her own in out-of-the-way places; with only strangers for company. But her experience with the guard had bruised her confidence and she felt as though she were recovering from an assault. This made her all the more grateful for the child's presence: she knew that if it weren't for him it would have been much harder for her to put her trust in a complete stranger as she had done. It was true, then, that in a way the boy was her protector. The recognition of this made her do something that did not come easily. She was not given to displays of affection but now, in a brief gesture of gratitude, she opened her arms and gave the boy a hug.

As she released the child, she noticed he was looking intently at her hands - her wallet was still wedged between her fingers. With a guilty start, she remembered that she had made no mention of money to the fisherman. Opening the wallet, she took out a wad of Indian currency and separated a thin sheaf of notes from the rest. She was counting out the money when she became aware of their attention and looked up. They appeared to be transfixed and their eyes were following her fingers as though she were

performing some intricate feat of jugglery. There was a wonderment in their faces that told her that their absorption was not a function of greed; it was just that they had never before been in the proximity of so large a sum of money and so many crisp currency notes. Yet, despite the closeness of this scrutiny, Pokir seemed not to have understood that it was for him that she was counting the money: when she offered the notes to him, he recoiled guiltily, as though she'd offered him some kind of contraband.

The sum she had counted out was small, no more than she might elsewhere have paid for a few sandwiches and a couple of coffees. Her research grant was too tight to allow her to be lavish, but this small token, at least, she felt she did owe him, and if he had had a shirt she would have tucked the money right into his pocket. As it happened, apart from his wet loincloth he was wearing nothing but a small cylindrical medallion tied to his arm with a string, just above the bicep. Unable to think of 'any other expedient, she twisted the notes into a roll and thrust them under the medallion. His skin, she noticed, was bristling with goosebumps and she could not tell whether this was a reaction to her touch or to the chilly evening wind.

A loud exclamation followed as Pokir retrieved the money. When the notes were in his hands, he examined them as if in disbelief, holding them at a distance from his face. Presently, with a gesture in the direction of the recently departed launch, he peeled a single note from the bundle and held it aloft. She understood that he was telling her that he would accept that one note as compensation for the money that had been taken from him. He handed this to the boy, who darted off to hide it somewhere in the thatch of the boat's hood.

The other notes he gave back to her, and when she attempted to protest, he pointed towards the horizon and repeated the word she herself had uttered earlier: 'Lusibari.' She recognized he was deferring the matter of payment until they arrived at Lusibari, and there she was content to let the matter rest.

After You Read

1. Think about the plot of the story:

- Describe the appearance of Piya? Why did Kanai think tht she was not Indian? Name the items of her clothes which can be the indication of the nationality.
- Why was Kanai eager to know who she was and the reason she was in Canning?
- Give the character scatch of Kanai.
- Are there some hints in the text that show Piya as an experienced traveler?
- Why wasn't the seat satisfactory for Kanai? How did Kanai persuade the man to change places?

6. What stylistic devices are used to nature and people in these sentences from the text? Give other examples.

a)“When these channels meet, it is often in dusters of four, five or even six: at these confluences, the water stretches to the far edges of the landscape and the forest dwindles into a distant rumour of land, echoing back from the horizon.”

b)“The islands are the trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringe of her sari, the *achol* that follows her, half-wetted by the sea”.

c)“The train had ground to a halt now and people were surging towards the doors of the compartment. Rising to her feet, Piya slung her backpacks over her shoulders”.

d)“Your company will lighten the burden of my exile”.



In this unit you will read:

- Sadeq Hedayat *The Blind Owl*

Sadeq Hedayat: Biography

Sadeq (or Sadegh) Hedayat was born to an aristocratic family and was educated at Dar ol-Fonoon (1914-1916) and the Lycée Français (French high school) in Tehran. In 1925, he was among a select few students who travelled to Europe to continue their studies. There, he initially pursued dentistry before giving this up for engineering. After four years in France and Belgium, Hedayat returned to Iran where he held various jobs for short periods.

Hedayat subsequently devoted his whole life to studying Western literature and to learning and investigating Iranian history and folklore. The works of Guy de Maupassant, Anton Chekhov, Rainer Maria Rilke, Edgar Allan Poe and Franz Kafka intrigued him the most. During his short literary life span, Hedayat published a substantial number of short stories and novelettes, two historical dramas, a play, a travelogue, and a collection of satirical parodies and sketches. His writings also include numerous literary criticisms, studies in Persian folklore, and many translations from Middle Persian and French. He is credited with having brought Persian language and literature into the mainstream of international contemporary writing. There is no doubt that Hedayat was the most modern of all modern writers in Iran. Yet, for Hedayat, modernity was not just a question of scientific rationality or a pure imitation of European values.

In his later years, feeling the socio-political problems of the time, Hedayat started attacking the two major causes of Iran's decimation, the monarchy and the clergy, and through his stories he tried to impute the deafness and blindness of the nation to the abuses of these two major powers. Feeling alienated by everyone around him, especially by his peers, Hedayat's last published work, *The Message of Kafka*, bespeaks melancholy, desperation and a sense of doom experienced only by those subjected to discrimination and repression.

Hedayat's most enduring work is the short novel *The Blind Owl* of 1937. It has been called "one of the most important literary works in the Persian language" (S.A.Qudsi).

He ended his life by gassing himself and is buried in the Père Lachaise. Hedayat's last day and night was adapted into the short film, *The Sacred and The Absurd*, which was featured in the Tribeca Film Festival in 2004.

Available at: http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Sadegh_Hedayat

Sadeq Hedayat "The Blind Owl"

Before You Read

1. To better understand this story read Nasim Basiri's article "Death and Women in Sadegh Hedayat's "The Blind Owl" below:

The message of The Blind Owl

The original Persian text of *The Blind Owl*, marked "not for sale in Iran," appeared as a mimeographed publication in India in ۱۹۳۷. It was assumed at the time that Hedayat feared the repressive rule of Reza Shah; he feared especially that with the publication of this work he might have violated the established norms. He was aware that the propagation of a message that focused on the strangulation of the Iranian people, on the denial of individual human rights, and on the need for individual enlightenment would not remain undetected for ever.

Unable to decode Hedayat's message in a coherent, logical manner, critics of the work relied on "gut" feelings and personal reactions to the novella's depressing setting and morbid circumstances as criteria for substantiating their arguments. No substantial study appeared in which a step by step development of events in the novella would lead to a sound and logical conclusion regarding either the intent of the author or the message of the book.

Is it possible that the concept of the *Clear Light* (from Tibetan Buddhism) may embody the message of *The Blind Owl* in the same way that the *Nag-serpent* held the clue to its structure? No longer a patchwork of hallucinations, a conglomeration of transposed passages and images, Hedayat's masterpiece is gradually emerging as a meaningful philosophical utterance on man's most sublime quest--the quest for freedom.

Using the *Clear Light* as the focal point of the work, Hedayat summarizes the Tibetan rituals described in the *Bardo Thodol* perfectly and, alongside them, presents his own views of a man's loneliness, disappointment and potential. Sensitive to the social problems of his time (hardly different from our own reality), aware of the need to speak up for his generation and for those who follow, cognizant that all literary activities are monitored closely by Reza Shah's literati, Hedayat wraps his indelible message in ancient Indian traditions normally unknown to Muslim Iranians. Drawing on a highly eclectic mind and a ceaseless zeal for freedom from the many forces that compel man to form social ties, to create religious institutions and to fear an almighty, Hedayat sets out to write about the disappointments of mankind, experienced in self-imposed "prisons" guarded by the self and the elements.

It should be noted that *The Blind Owl* is in two parts, each part depicting a phase on a continuum of the cosmic drama dealing with birth and rebirth. While in the first life the character is distracted by visions that destine him to rebirth, in the second life, using the knowledge gained in his previous life, he successfully recognizes the cause of his rebirth and eliminates it. The analysis that follows details the dynamics of the narrator's cosmic metamorphosis.

Finally, Hedayat follows the fundamental activities of the Tibetan rituals, even parts like the actual physical dismemberment of the body in orthodox ceremonies (not included in most texts), with an extreme degree of circumspection. Reading *The Blind Owl* with the Tibetan materials in mind, one feels as if Hedayat felt compelled to preserve the texts on a different plane.

The three stages of the Bardo

The *Bardo Thodol*, also known as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, chronicles the journey of the soul from one life to another in three transitional stages, or *bardo* periods, emphasizing that the teachings of the *Lama* are effectual only if mastered during one's life on the earthplane. Practical use of these teachings during the terrifying *bardo* state after death is believed to help the consciousness of the deceased to concentrate on the recognition of the *Clear Light* and, consequently, to avoid distraction from the regions of *Sangsara*. ♡ Failure to master the teachings (i.e., inability to recognize the *Light*), results in a repetition of *Sangsaric* existences or rebirths.

The *bardo* process described below assumes that the soul undergoes the full *bardo* (♣⁹ days) and is reborn. This is the process that most human beings are believed to undergo.

When the final stages of earthly life approach, a *Lama* (priest) is sent for. The *Lama's* aim, at this stage, is to restore complete consciousness to the deceased, who has fallen into a swoon immediately after death. He tries to accustom the deceased to the unfamiliar environment of the Otherworld. Furthermore, assuming that the deceased is one of the unenlightened multitude incapable of immediate emancipation, he prepares the deceased's soul to combat the forces of *Maya*, ♢ teaching him to concentrate on the *Clear Light* and thus enabling him to achieve a degree of salvation. If his failure to recognize the *Clear Light* continues for four days after he recovers from his after-death swoon, he enters the second, or the *Chonyid Bardo*.

The *Chonyid Bardo* is of great importance especially for those who have meditated much during their lives on the earth plane. During this *bardo* the soul experiences terrifying feelings. He hears dreadful sounds; awesome scenes are enacted before his eyes. The *Lama*, to help him concentrate on the *Clear Light* and avoid distraction by these frightful apparitions. These sounds, the soul is told, are the sounds of the deceased's own breathing.

For the next fourteen days the Peaceful and the Wrathful Deities dawn and shine on the deceased. Along with these bright lights, divine lights, various dull lights of stupidity, violent anger and egotism, from the regions of *Sangsara* will shine. This

failure sets the soul on the path to rebirth. The *Lama* warns the deceased to ignore the dull lights, concentrating on the bright lights.

The central figure in the scene is Dharma-Raja, the Lord of Death. His head-dress is adorned with human skulls and a serpent forms his necklace. In his left hand he holds the mirror of *Karma*, in which every good and evil act of the deceased under judgment is reflected. Furthermore, he sits underneath the *Bodhi* tree that accommodates the Lord Buddha .

Directly in front of the Lord of Death stands Sprehu Gochan, holding the scales. Each soul that appears before the Lord of Death carries either white or black pebbles. Those carrying white pebbles are souls that have recognized the workings of Illusion. Those carrying black pebbles are souls that continue to be under the domination of *Karma*; they are hurled down the abyss. The River of Forgetfulness carries them to Mount Meru and the place of their rebirth. Floating down the River of Forgetfulness, the souls return to the Place of the Wombs where they are reborn.

The sight of these terrifying visions fatigues the soul and the sound of his own breath, like laughter issuing from a hollow, frightens him. He falls into a swoon. Upon revival, the soul returns to the death-chamber, where he lately saw his earth-plane body. It is at this point that he realizes that he has died, he is, however, still under the impression that he dwells in a body of flesh and blood. Soon, with the realization of death becoming stronger, his thought-body becomes weak and the soul feels naked. He begins to search for the place of his rebirth, the place in which his judgment had been set. Before finding this place, however, the soul must find a body that can take him there.

2. a) Be ready to explain the meaning of the following adjectives in English and write down their transcription:

dubious, prevalent, ominous, transient, stooped, repulsive, delirious, arid, enchanting, wrinkled, ramshackle.

b) Collocate the expressions with the words given from the list:

beliefs, beam, laughter, man, eyes, mountain, dress, hearse, smile, scar, fever.

c) Make up your own sentences with the expressions and translate them.

3. Choose the correct verb to the definition:

beguile, gnaw, obliterate, defile, relegate.

- to keep biting something hard; to make someone feel worried or frightened.

- to give someone or something a less important position than before.

- to persuade or trick someone into doing something, especially by saying nice things to them.

- to destroy something so completely that no sign of it remains.

- to make something less pure or good.

3. Put in the necessary verb from the list into the sentences: **beguile, gnaw, obliterate, defile, relegate.**

The entire village wasby incendiary bombs.
These disgusting videos and corrupt the minds of the young.
He the voters with his good looks and grand talk.
She has been very moody – something is at her.
Accademic excellence seems to have been to a role of
secondary importance.

4. Insert the necessary preposition.

I think they made the wine the occasion of my birth. It has no
relevance the subject at hand. The old man had a dry and repulsive
laughter, a hybrid mocking laughter, which made one's hair stand ...
end. My blows had little effect ... the thick, massive wall, now like a
wall of lead. But ... of habit, and a special sense which was
awakened me, I arrived my doorstep, where I perceive that a
black-clad figure, the figure of a woman, was sitting the platform
of my house.

“The Blind Owl”

Sadegh Hedayat

Traslated to English by Iraj Bashiri

In life there are certain sores that, like a canker, gnaw at the soul in solitude
and diminish it. Since generally it is the custom to relegate these incredible sufferings
to the realm of rare and singular accidents and happenings, it is not possible to reveal
them to anyone. If one does talk or write about them, people pretend to accept them
with sarcastic remarks and dubious smiles, while adhering either to prevalent beliefs
or to their own ideas about them. The reason is that as yet man has not found a
remedy for these sores; the only remedy now is forgetfulness induced by wine or,
artificial sleep induced by opium and other narcotics. It is a pity, however, that the
effect of these drugs is transitory and that after a while, instead of soothing, they add
to the pain.

Will it come to pass one day that someone will penetrate the secrets of these
supernatural happenings and recognize this reflection of the shadow of the soul which
manifests itself in a coma-like limbo between sleep and wakefulness?

I shall only describe one such incident which happened to me and which has
shocked me so much that I shall never forget it; its ominous scar will poison my life
throughout-from the beginning to the end of eternity where no man's understanding
can fathom. Did I say poisoned? Well, I meant to say that I am scathed by it and will
remain so for the rest of my mortal life.

I shall try to put down whatever I recall, whatever has remained in my memory
of the relations that connect the events. Perhaps I can make a universal judgment
about it. No. I want merely to become sure, or else to believe it myself, because it is
immaterial to me whether other people believe me or not. Simply, I am afraid that I
may die tomorrow but still not know myself, because in the course of life experiences
I have realized that a frightful chasm lies between others and me. I also have realized

that I should keep silent as much as possible and that I should keep my thoughts to myself. If I have decided that I should write, It is only because I should introduce myself to my shadow--a shadow which rests in a stooped position on the wall, and which appears to be voraciously swallowing all that I write down. It is for him that I want to do an experiment to see if we can know each other better, because since the time I severed my relations with the others, I have wanted to know myself better.

Absurd thoughts! It may be so, but they torture me more than any reality. Are not these people who resemble me, and who seemingly have the same needs, whims and desires as I do--are they not here to deceive me? Are they not shadows brought into existence merely to mock and beguile me? Isn't that which I feel, see and measure imaginary throughout and quite different from reality?

I write only for my shadow which is cast on the wall in front of the light. I must introduce myself to it.

.....
In this base world, full of poverty and misery, for the first time I thought a ray of sunshine had shone on my life. But alas, it was not a sunbeam, rather it was only a transient beam, a shooting star, which appeared to me in the likeness of a woman or an angel. And in the light of that moment, lasting only about a second, I witnessed all my life's misfortunes, and I discovered their magnitude and grandeur. Then this beam of light disappeared again into the dark abyss into which it was destined to disappear. No. I could not keep this transient beam for myself.

It was three months, no, it was two months and four days since I had lost her, but the memory of her enchanting eyes, no, the attractive malice of her eyes, remained in my life forever. How can I forget one who is so pertinent to my life?

No, I will not call her by name, because she, with that ethereal body, slim and misty, with those two large, wonder stricken, sparkling eyes behind which my life was gradually and painfully burning and melting away, she no longer belongs to this base, fierce world. No, I should not disgrace her name with earthly things. After seeing her I withdrew from the circle of people. I withdrew completely from the circle of the fools and the fortunate; and, for forgetfulness, I took refuge in wine and opium. I passed, and still pass, my life daily within the four walls of my room. My whole life has passed within the confines of four walls.

My daily occupation was the painting of pence covers; my entire time was dedicated to the painting of pence covers and to the consumption of alcohol and opium. I had chosen the ridiculous profession of pencecover painting to kill the time.

By a lucky chance my house is located outside the city, in a quiet and restful spot, away from the hustle and bustle of people's lives. Its boundaries are well defined and around it there are some ruins. From beyond the ditch, however, some low mud-brick houses are visible and the city begins there. I do not know which madman or which ill-disposed architect built this house in forgotten times, but when I close my eyes, not only all its nooks and crannies materialize before my eyes but I feel its pressure on my shoulders. It is a house that could have been painted only on ancient pences.

I must write about all these events to assure myself that they are not figments of my imagination. I must explain them to my shadow which is cast on the wall. To begin with, before this incident there had remained for me only one source of cheerfulness or of content. I used to paint on pence covers within the confines of the four walls of my room, and I used to pass the time with this ridiculous amusement; but after I saw those two eyes, and after I saw her, every work, every movement lost its inherent value and meaning entirely. What is strange, however, and what is incredible is that, for some reason, the subjects of all my painted scenes have been of the same type and shape. I always used to draw a cypress tree under which an old man, wrapped in a cloak, hunching his shoulders in the manner of the Indian yogis, sat in a squatting position. He wore a shalma around his head, and he put the index finger of his left hand on his lips as a sign of astonishment. Opposite him a girl, wearing a long, black dress, was bending to offer him a lily. She was bending because a brook intervened between them. Had I seen this image before, or was it inspired in a dream? I do not know. I only know that whatever I painted revolved around this scene and this same subject; my hand drew this scene involuntarily. And still more incredible than this is the fact that there were customers for this picture. I even used to send some of these pence covers to India in care of my uncle, who used to sell them and return the money.

I do not recall it correctly, because this picture used to appear to me to be distant as well as close by at the same time. Now I recall an incident. I said that I must write down my recollections; but the writing of these notes occurred much later. It has no relevance to the subject at hand. Although it was to devote myself to writing that I abandoned pence-cover painting. Two months ago, no two months and four days ago, was the thirteenth day of Farvardin. Everybody had rushed to the countryside. In order to paint undisturbed, I had shut the window of my room. Around sunset, when I was busy painting, the door suddenly opened and my uncle entered-- that is to say, he said he was my uncle. I had never seen him before because from his early youth he had been on a distant journey. Perhaps he was a ship captain. I thought he had some mercantile business with me, because apparently he was a merchant as well. In any case, my uncle was a stooped old man who wore an Indian shalma around his head and a yellow torn cloak on his shoulders. He had covered his head and face with a scarf. His collar was open and his hairy chest could be seen. One could count the hairs of his thin beard as it protruded through his scarf. With his red, fistular eyelids and leprous lip, he bore a very distant and ridiculous resemblance to me, as if my reflection had fallen on a magic mirror. I had always imagined my father as looking something like that. Upon entering, he retired to the corner of the room and sat there in a squatting position. Thinking that I should prepare something and offer it to him, I lit a light and entered the closet of my room. I searched everywhere for something that would be suitable for an old man to eat. This I did though I knew there was nothing in the house. There was neither any opium nor any wine left for me. Suddenly the built-in niche below the ceiling caught my eye. As if inspired, I recalled an ancient wine flask that I had inherited. I think they had made the wine on the occasion of my birth. The wine flask was in the niche. I had never thought of this

wine before. In fact I had forgotten that such a thing existed in the house. To reach the niche, I put a nearby stool under my feet. But as soon as I tried to pick up the wine flask, I was distracted by the following scene through the air inlet in the niche: In the field behind my room a bent, stooped old man was squatting under a cypress tree, and a young girl, no, a heavenly angel was standing in front of him, bending to give him a black lily with her right hand. The old man was chewing on the index finger of his left hand.

Although the girl was located exactly opposite me, it seemed that she did not pay attention to what was happening around her. She was looking without seeing anything, and an unconscious, involuntary smile had dried to the corner of her lips; it seemed as though she was thinking of an absent person. It was from the stool that I saw her dreadful charming eyes, eyes which were enchanting and reproachful at the same time. It was to the shining and dreadful balls of those worried, threatening and inviting eyes that my single beam of life was attracted, and it was to the depth of those same eyes that my life was drawn and in them annihilated. This attractive mirror drew my whole being to itself in a way unthinkable to any human being. Her curved Turkmen eyes with their intoxicating supernatural beam frightened as well as attracted. She seemed to have witnessed, with those eyes, supernatural happenings beyond those any mortal could witness. Her cheeks were high, her forehead wide, her eyebrows thin and connected and her lips meaty and half open. Her lips seemed to have just finished a long, warm kiss with which they were not yet satisfied. A tress of her disheveled, uncontrolled black hair which framed her silvery face was stuck on her temple. The tenderness of her limbs and the heedlessness of her ethereal movements bespoke her transient nature. Only a dancing girl at an Indian temple could have her harmonious gait.

She wore a wrinkled, black dress which, fitting her well, stuck to her body. When I saw her, she was about to jump over the brook which separated her from the old man. She failed. The old man laughed hysterically. He had a dry and repulsive laughter, a hybrid mocking laughter, which made one's hair stand on end. His facial expression did not change. It was the resonance of a laughter emerging from the depth of a hollow. With the wine flask in my hand, I jumped off the stool out of fright. For some reason I was shaking: a shiver in which fright and enjoyment were intermingled. I felt as if I had jumped up from a pleasantly nightmarish dream. I rested the wine flask on the ground and held my head between my hands. How many minutes--hours? I don't know. When I came to, I took the wine flask and reentered the room. My uncle had gone and the door of my room, like the open mouth of a corpse, was left ajar. The ring of the old man's laughter still echoed in my ears.

Even though it was getting dark, and the lamp was smoking, the effect of the pleasant and frightful shiver that I had felt was not wearing off. From this moment my life's direction changed. One glance was enough to bring about the change, because that heavenly angel, that ethereal girl, touched me more deeply than any human being would be able to comprehend.

I was not in full control of myself, and it seemed that I knew her name from before. The evil in her eyes, her color, her scent and her movements were all familiar

to me. It was as though my souls, in the life before this, in the world of imagination, had bordered on her soul and that both souls, of the same essence and substance, were destined for union. I must have lived this life very close to her. I had no desire to touch her; the invisible beams that emanated from our bodies and mingled were sufficient for me. Isn't this terrifying experience which seemed so familiar to me quite the same as the feelings of two lovers who feel that they have known each other before and that a mysterious relationship has previously existed between them? Was it possible that someone else could affect me? The dry, repulsive and ominous laughter of the old man, however, tore our bonds asunder.

I thought about this throughout the night. Several times I wanted to go to the hole in the wall and look, but I was afraid of the old man's laughter. The next day I was still thinking of the same thing. Was it possible for me to give up seeing her entirely? The day after that, eventually, with such fear and trepidation I decided to put the wine flask back in its place. But when I pushed aside the curtain which covered the entrance to the closet, and looked in front of me, I saw a dark, black wall, as dark as the darkness which shrouds my whole life. I could not see any opening, crevice or hole to the outside. The square hole in the wall was completely closed and it had become part of the wall, as if it had never existed. I pulled the stool to me, but no matter how hard I struck my fists against the wall and listened, or how hard I looked at the wall in the light of the lamp, there was no trace of a hole in the wall. My blows had little effect on the thick, massive wall, now like a wall of lead.

Could I give all this up permanently? Yes, but everything was out of my control. Like a soul under torture, no matter how much I waited, guarded, or searched for her, it was all to no avail. Like the murderer who returns to the scene of his crime, or like a chicken with its head cut off, I walked all around outside our house, not for one day, but for two months and four days. I walked around our house so much that I could recognize every rock and pebble around there. I did not, however, find even a trace of the cypress tree, the stream of water, or of the people I had seen there. For nights on end I knelt on the ground in the moonlight, I wept and sought redress from the trees, from the stones and from the moon which she may have looked at, but I did not see any sign of her. On the contrary, I realized that all these activities were useless, because she could not be related to the substance of this world. For instance, the water with which she washed her hair must have come from a unique and unknown spring, or from a magical cave. Her dress was not made of the warp and woof of ordinary wool and cotton, or sewn by hands made of natural elements, like ordinary human hands. She was a distinguished creature. I realized that the lilies also were not ordinary lilies. I became certain that if she were to wash her face in ordinary water, her face would wither and if she were to pluck ordinary lilies with her long and delicate fingers, like flower petals, her fingers would wither as well.

I learned all these things. I found this girl, not this angel, to be a source of astonishment and indescribable inspiration for me. Her substance was delicate and intangible. It was she who created the sense of worship in me. I was certain that the gaze of a stranger, or of an ordinary person, would make her look shabby and withered.

Since the time when I lost her, since the time when a heavy wall, a solid, moist dam as heavy as lead, was created between her and me, I have felt that my life has become useless and confounded. Although her kind look, and the deep pleasure that I drew from seeing her, were universal--she would have no answers for me because she did not see me--nevertheless, I needed those eyes, and only one glance from her was sufficient to solve all philosophical difficulties and theological enigmas for me. After one glance from her, there would remain no mystery or secret for me.

From this time on, I increased my drinking, I smoked more opium. But alas, despite these remedies for hopelessness, which were meant to paralyze and numb my thoughts, making me forget the thought of her, her figure and her face materialized in front of me more strongly daily, hourly, by the minute.

How could I forget? When my eyes were open, or when I closed them, in sleep and wakefulness, she was in front of me. Through the hole in the closet of my room as through a hole in the night that enshrouds people's thought and logic--through the square hole which opened to the outside, she was constantly in front of me.

I was not allowed to rest; how could I rest? I formed the habit of taking promenades quite late--at sunset. For some reason I wanted, I felt I had to find the stream of water, the cypress tree and the lily plant. In the same way that I had become addicted to opium, I became accustomed to these promenades; it was as though some force compelled me to them. All along the way, all the time, I was thinking of her, recalling my initial glimpse of her. I wanted to find the place where I saw her on the thirteenth day of Farvardin.

The last evening that, like other evenings, I went on a walk, it was dark and it felt like rain, A thick mist covered everything. In the rainy weather which decreases the sharpness of colors, and diminishes the rudeness of the lines of objects, I felt free and relaxed, as though the raindrops were washing my black thoughts away. During this night, that which should not have happened came to pass. During these lonesome hours, during those minutes the duration of which I cannot recall exactly, I walked about involuntarily. In spite of the fog, her vague and shocking face--like the picture on pence covers emerging from behind the clouds and smoke—her motionless, expressionless face continued to materialize before my eyes much more powerfully than ever before.

It was quite late at night when I returned. A dense fog was hanging in the air, and I could not see the way clearly. But out of habit, and through a special sense which was awakened in me, I arrived at my doorstep, where I perceived that a black-clad figure, the figure of a woman, was sitting on the platform of my house.

I struck a match to find the keyhole, but for some reason my eyes involuntarily caught sight of the blackclad figure, and I recognized the two oblique eyes—two large, black eyes amid a silvery thin face--the same eyes which stared at a man's face without actually seeing. And I would have recognized her, even if I had not seen her before. No. I was not deceived. This black-clad figure was she. I stood there. I was petrified and felt like someone who is dreaming, and who knows that he is asleep, but who cannot wake up when he wants to. The match burnt itself, and then my fingers. Suddenly I returned to reality, turned the key, opened the door, and drew myself

aside. Like someone familiar with the way, she got off the platform and crossed the dark corridor. She opened the door of my room and entered. I, following her, entered my room. Hurriedly I lit the lamp and saw that she had retired to my bed and was now lying on it. Her face was in the shade. I did not know whether she could see me or hear me. Her outward appearance showed no trace of fear or of desire to resist me. It seemed as though she had come here involuntarily.

Was she sick? Had she lost her way? She had come here unconsciously, quite in the same way that a sleep-walker would. No living creature can imagine the mental state I experienced at this moment. I felt a pleasant, yet indescribable, pain. No. I was not deceived. That lady was this same girl who had entered my room without being astonished, without uttering a word. I had always imagined our first meeting to be like this. This state was like a deep sleep, endless sleep for me; one has to be in a very deep sleep to have such a dream. The silence was like an eternal life for me, because one cannot speak at the beginning, or at the end of eternity.

To me she was a woman, and she had something supernatural about her. Her face reminded me of the confounding oblivion of other people's faces so strongly that upon seeing her my whole body began to shake, and my knees gave way. At this moment, I saw the whole painful story of my life behind her large eyes, her extremely large eyes, wet and glistening eyes, like black diamond balls thrown into tears. In her eyes, in her black eyes, I found the eternal night, the dense darkness I had been searching for, and I plunged into its awesome, enchanting darkness. I felt as though some force was being extracted from my being; the ground was shaking underneath my feet. Had I fallen to the ground at that moment, I would have drawn an indescribable pleasure from that fall.

My heart stopped. Fearing that my breath might make her disappear, as if she were a piece of cloud or a puff of smoke, I restrained myself from breathing. Her silence was like a miracle. It was as though a glass wall intervened between us. This Moment, this hour, this eternity was choking me. Her weary eyes, as if witnessing something extraordinary which others cannot see--as if seeing death--were gradually closing. Eventually, her eyelids closed. The intensity of the moment shook me as if I were a drowning man coming to the surface for air. I wiped the perspiration from my forehead with the edge of my sleeve.

Her face had the same calm and motionless expression but it looked smaller and thinner. As she reclined she was chewing on the index finger of her left hand. Her face was the color of silver, and through her thin, black garment which fit her tightly one could see the outline of her legs, arms, the two breasts, and all the rest of her body.

Since her eyes were closed, I bent in order to see her better. But no matter how closely I observed her, it seemed that she was quite distant from me. Suddenly I felt that I had no information whatsoever about the secrets of her heart, and that there existed no relationship between the two of us.

I wanted to say something, but I was afraid that her ears, accustomed to some distant, heavenly and soft music, might become hateful because of my voice. It occurred to me that she might be hungry or thirsty. I entered the closet of my room in

order to find something for her, although I knew that there was nothing to be found in the house. But then, as if inspired, I recalled that above, in the niche, I had a flask of old wine which I had inherited from my father. I used the stool and brought the flask down. Tiptoeing carefully, I went to the side of the bed. She was sleeping like a tired, exhausted child. She was in a deep sleep and her long eyelashes, like velvet, were closed. I took the cap off the flask and through her locked teeth, gently poured a cup of wine down her throat.

For the first time in my life a feeling of sudden tranquillity had appeared, because those eyes were closed. It seemed that the canker that tortured me, and the nightmare that pressed my insides with its iron claws, had somewhat subsided. I brought my own chair, placed it beside the bed and stared at her face. What a childish face, and what a strange disposition! Was it possible that this woman, this girl, or this angel of torture (because otherwise, I didn't know what to call her), was it possible that she could have a double life? To be so quiet, and to be so unceremonious?

Now I could feel the warmth of her body, and I could smell the damp scent that rose from the heavy, black locks. My hand was not under my control, but yet I raised it and caressed a lock of her hair with it, the lock that was always stuck to her temple. Then I sank my fingers in her locks. Her hair was cold and damp, cold, absolutely cold. It was as though she had died several days ago. And I was not mistaken she was dead. I passed my hand in front of her chest and placed it on her breast and her heart. There was no sign of a heartbeat. Then I brought the mirror and held that in front of her nose. There was not even a trace of life in her...

Intending to make her warm with the heat of my own body, to give her my warmth and receive the coldness of death from her, hoping that in this way I could possibly blow my own soul into her body.

Her whole body had become cold, as cold as hailstones. I felt my blood freezing in my veins, and the cold penetrating to the depths of my heart. All my efforts being useless, I climbed off the bed. Not it was not a lie. She had come here to my room, to my bed and surrendered her body to me. She gave me her body, and she gave me her soul--both!

While she was still alive, while her eyes were brimful with life, only the memory of her eyes tortured me, but now, devoid of feeling and motionless and cold, with eyes already closed, she came and surrendered herself to me. With closed eyes!

This was the same creature that had poisoned my entire life; or maybe my life was originally susceptible to being poisoned, and I could not have had any life beside a poisoned life. Now here in my room she gave me her body and her shadow. Her brittle, transient soul, which had no relation to the world of earthly beings, slowly came out of her black, wrinkled dress--the body that tortured her--and went away to the world of wandering shadows. Perhaps it took my shadow with it as well. Her body, however, devoid of any feeling or motion, was lying there.

At this moment my thoughts froze. A unique, singular life was created in me, because my life was bound to all the existences that surrounded me, all the shadows that trembled around me. I felt an inseparable, deep relation with the world, with the movement of all creatures and with nature. All the elements of myself and of nature

were related by the invisible streams of some minddisturbing, agitating current. No thought or image was unnatural for me. I could understand the secrets of the ancient paintings, the mysteries of difficult, philosophical treatises, and the eternal foolishness of forms and norms, because at this moment I was participating in the revolution of the earth and the planets, in the growth of the plants, and in the activities of the animal world. The past and the future, far and near, shared my sentient life and were at one with me.

At such times everyone takes refuge in a strong habit, or in a scruple that he has developed in his life: the drunkard becomes drunk, the writer writes, the stonecutter cuts stones, each giving vent to his anxiety and anger by escaping into the strong stimulant of his own life. And it is in moments like these that a real artist can create a masterpiece. But I, I who was devoid of talent and who was poor, a painter of pence covers, what could I do? With these dry, glistening and lifeless pictures, all of which were the same, as models, what could I paint that would become a masterpiece? But in my whole being I felt an excessive upsurge of talent and warmth; it was a special agitation and stimulus. I wanted to draw those eyes, which were now closed forever, on a piece of paper and keep them for myself. This sensation forced me to realize my wish, that is, I did not do this voluntarily--one does not when one is imprisoned with a corpse. The thought of being imprisoned with a corpse filled me with a special joy.

I do not recall exactly how many times I copied her face, but none of my reproductions was satisfactory. I tore them up as I finished painting them. I neither felt tired because of doing this, nor did I feel the passage of time.

It was about daybreak. A dull light had entered my room through the windowpanes. I was busy working on a picture which, in my own opinion, was better than the rest. But the eyes? The eyes, which had assumed a reproachful expression as if I had committed unforgivable sins--I could not put those eyes down on paper. Then suddenly, all the life and the memory of those eyes disappeared from my mind. My efforts were useless. No matter how intensely I looked at her face, I still could not recall its expression. At this same time, I suddenly saw that her cheeks were reddening; they were a liver-red color like the color of the meat in front of a butcher shop. She came to life. Her exceedingly wide and astonished eyes, eyes in which all the brightness of life was gathered and glimmering in a sickly light, her sick, reproachful eyes very slowly opened and looked at my face. This was the first time that she was aware of my presence. She looked at me and then, once again, her eyes gradually closed. This event did not take more than perhaps a moment, but it was enough time for me to capture the expression of her eyes and put it on paper. I drew this expression with the sharp point of the brush, and this time I did not tear up the picture.

Then I got up from where I was painting, walked slowly to her and stood near her. I thought she was alive, that she had come back to life, and that my love had invested my spirit with her body; but as I drew near, I sensed the smell of a dead body--the smell of a decomposed, dead body. I took the painting with the utmost

care, and put it into my own tin can, where I keep my profits, then I hid the tin can in the closet of my room.

The night was moving on, tiptoeing stealthily. It seemed that it had sufficiently recovered from its weariness. Soft, distant sounds, like the sound of a fowl or a passing bird's dream or perhaps the whisper of the growth of the plants, could be sensed. The pale stars were disappearing behind the mass of clouds. I felt the gentle breath of the morning on my face, at the same time I heard the crow of a rooster from afar.

What could I do with her body? It had already started to disintegrate. First it occurred to me to bury her in my room; then I thought of taking her out and throwing her in a certain well around which black lilies have grown. But all these plots, to prevent other people from seeing, entailed much thought, labor and dexterity. Furthermore, since I did not wish any stranger to look at her, I had to do all this alone and with my own hands. I was not thinking of myself, because, after her, what else was there in living? But as far as she was concerned, no ordinary human being, no one except myself, should ever glance at her body. She came to my room, and she surrendered her cold body and her shadow to me, in order to prevent others from seeing her; in order not to become defiled by the looks of strangers. At last a thought crossed my mind: if I were to chop her body up and put it in a suitcase--my very own old suitcase--then I could take the suitcase out with me to a distant place, far away from people's eyes, and bury it there.

This time I no longer hesitated. I locked the suitcase and put the key in my pocket. When the job was complete, I felt relieved. I picked up the suitcase and weighed it: it was heavy. Never before had I felt so fatigued. Definitely no. I would never be able to carry that suitcase out by myself.

It was cloudy once again, and a light rain was falling. I left the room to look for someone who would help me carry the suitcase away. Not a soul was to be seen anywhere near. When I paid more attention, a little farther away from where I was, through the fog, I saw an old man who had hunched his shoulders and who was sitting under a cypress tree. His face, over which he had wrapped a wide scarf, could not be seen. Slowly I approached him, but before I could utter a word, a hybrid, dry and repulsive laughter which made my hair stand on end issued from the old man; then he said, "If you are looking for a porter, I can help you. Were you looking for a porter? I also own a carriage that I use as a hearse. Everyday I carry corpses to Shah Abdul Azim and bury them there. I also make coffins. I have coffins for every person's perfect measurements, not a hair off. I am ready myself-- right now!..."

He laughed so hysterically that his shoulders shook. With my hand, I pointed in the direction of my house. Without giving me an opportunity to utter a word, he said, "It's not necessary. I know where you live. Right now. Shall we go?"

He got up from where he was sitting, and I started to walk towards my house. I entered my room and, with great difficulty, brought the "dead" suitcase to the front of the door. There, I saw a ramshackle old hearse to which a pair of thin, black, skeleton-like horses were hitched. The old man, shoulders hunched, was sitting up there on the driver's seat. He had a long whip in his hand, and he did not turn to look

at me. With difficulty I placed the suitcase in the carriage, in the middle of which there was a special place for putting coffins. Then I climbed into the carriage and laid myself down in the middle of the place intended for coffins. I placed my head on the edge of this place so that I could see the surrounding scenery. Finally I slid the suitcase towards me, rested it on my chest, and held it tightly with both hands.

The whip whistled through the air, and the horses, whose labored breath issued through their nostrils like columns of smoke in rainy weathers began to move with long but gentle leaps. Their slim forelegs, like the hand of a thief severed of its fingers by law and plunged into hot oil, struck the ground gently and noiselessly. In the damp air, the sound of the bells on their necks had a special ring. An indescribable relief, the cause of which I did not know, had filled me from head to toe so thoroughly that I could barely feel the movement of the hearse. The only thing that I felt was the weight of the suitcase on my chest.

A thick fog covered the scenery on the sides of the road. The hearse was passing mountains plains and rivers with a special speed and comfort. Around me now a new and unique scene, one that I had seen neither in a dream nor in wakefulness, came to view. On both sides of the road there were mountains with serrated, jagged tops and strange, suppressed, cursed trees. From among the trees grey, triangular, cubic and prismatic houses with dark, low windows lacking any panes, were visible. These windows resembled the giddy eyes of one who is experiencing a delirious fever. I don't know what these walls had in them which enabled them to transfer their coldness and chill into a man's heart. Since no living being could ever dwell in those houses, they could only have been built to accommodate the shadows of ethereal beings.

Apparently either the carriage driver was taking me along a special road or he was taking a by-road. In some places the road was surrounded only by hacked tree trunks and crooked, bent trees. Behind the trees there were high and low geometrical houses--some conic, others in the shape of truncated cones. All the houses had narrow, crooked windows--from within which black lilies grew, clinging to the doors and walls. Then, suddenly, the whole scene disappeared under a thick fog. Pregnant, heavy clouds were hugging and pressing the mountain peaks, and drops of rain, like wandering particles of dust, were floating in the atmosphere. After traveling for quite some time, the hearse stopped near a high, arid mountain. I slid the suitcase away from my chest and got up.

Behind the mountain there was a secluded, quiet and pleasant spot, a place that even though I had not seen or recognized it, seemed to be quite familiar--it was not beyond my imagination. The surface of the ground was covered with scentless black lily plants as if until now no mortal had set foot on that ground. I put the suitcase down. The old carriage driver, turning his face away from me, said, 'This place is near Shah Abdul Azim. There is no place better for you than here. Not even a bird can be found here. Isn't that right!..."

I put my hand into my pocket to pay the carriage driver, but all the money I had in my pocket was two qerans and one 'abbasi. The carriage drivers, uttering a disgusting laugh, said, 'Forget it. Pay me later. I know where you live. Anything else

I can do for you? Let me tell you--as far as digging graves is concerned, I am quite experienced, you understand? Don't be shy! Let's go right over there near the river, by that cypress tree. I shall dig a ditch the size of the suitcase for you, and then I will leave.'

The old man, with an agility the like of which I could not imagine, jumped down from his seat. I picked up the suitcase and together we walked to a tree trunk, on the edge of the dry riverbed. Then he said, 'Is this place good?'

After You Read

Answer the questions:

1. When do we encounter the narrator?
2. Who came to visit the narrator? What does the visitor symbolize in the novel?
3. What scene did the narrator see outside his dwelling?
4. Name the main characters of the scene and explain what they symbolize.
5. Before reading the novel you have read the article about the Tibetan death rituals, using the information of that article reconsider the scene with the uncle, the wine flask and the scene outside his house.
6. Reread the first page of the novel. How did the narrator describe his life and state?
7. Find in the text adjectives which were used to describe eyes. Give examples.
8. Who helped the narrator to carry her dead body? How did the man's horses look like?
9. Describe the scenery and weather on the day the narrator was taking the corpse to bury?
10. What genre would you class the novel as?
11. Did any of the description seem unnecessary or out of place?
12. Was the plot line easy to follow? Was it confusing or predictable?

Unit 7

Turkish literature



In this unit you will read:

- An interview with Orhan Pamuk
- Orhan Pamuk “My Father’s Suitcase”

Orhan Pamuk: Biography

Orhan Pamuk was born in Istanbul in 1952 and grew up in a large family similar to those which he describes in his novels *Cevdet Bey and His Sons* and *The Black Book*, in the wealthy westernised district of Nisantasi. As he writes in his autobiographical book *Istanbul*, from his childhood until the age of 22 he devoted himself largely to painting and dreamed of becoming an artist. After graduating from the secular American Robert College in Istanbul, he studied architecture at Istanbul Technical University for three years, but abandoned the course when he gave up his ambition to become an architect and artist. He went on to graduate in journalism from Istanbul University, but never worked as a journalist. At the age of 23 Pamuk decided to become a novelist, and giving up everything else retreated into his flat and began to write.

Now he is one of Turkey's most prominent novelists, his work has sold over seven million books in more than fifty languages, making him the country's best-selling writer. Pamuk is the recipient of numerous literary awards, including the Nobel Prize in Literature 2006 - the first Nobel Prize to be awarded to a Turkish citizen.

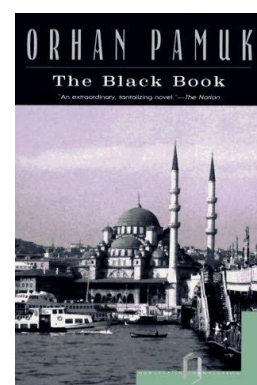
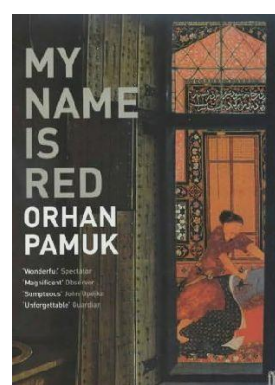
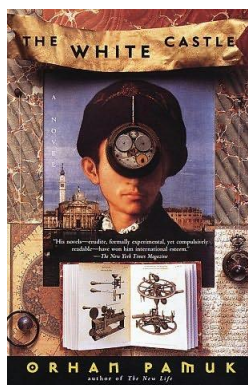


Known for his epic, multifaceted stories in which the protagonist is often caught between two worlds, Pamuk interweaves elements from the West's pantheon of postmodern prose into his fiction while also blurring the line between realism and fantasy that is a hallmark of the greatest works of Arabic literature. "The polarities of Pamuk's books," noted the *New Yorker*'s David Remnick, "echo the basic polarities of Istanbul: the tension between East and West, the pull of an Islamic past and the lure of modern European manners and materialism."

The first of Pamuk's works to appear in English was *The White Castle* in 1990. A year later, it was issued by Braziller and made it to the *New York Times* year-end list of the most notable books of 1991. Set in the 1690s, the plot follows the fantastical journey of a Venetian scholar who is taken prisoner by Turkish pirates and arrives in Constantinople—the former name of Istanbul—where he is sold into slavery and becomes the property of a scientist.

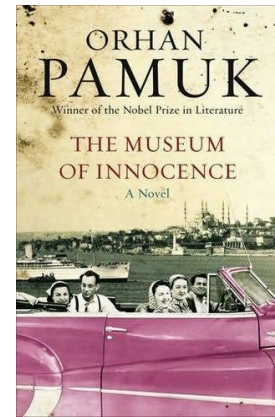
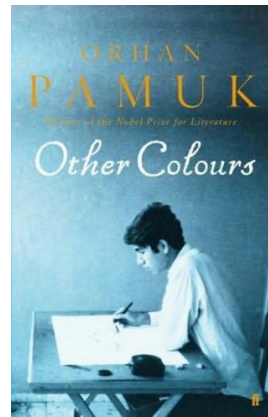
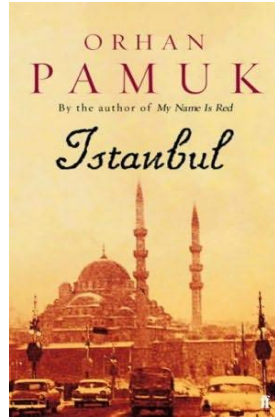
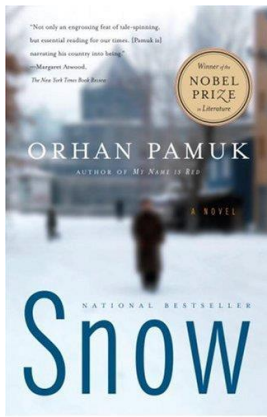
The Black Book was published in 1994. The story centers around a young lawyer in Istanbul named Galip, whose wife, Ruya, has disappeared. He sets out on a mission to find her, and the mystery is further deepened by the fact that Ruya's half-brother—a controversial journalist—has also vanished. The city of Istanbul, with its layers of history and myth, plays a central part in the story.

Pamuk's next novel, *The New Life*, was another bestseller when it was published in Turkey in 1994. Its story is anchored by a mysterious, magical text which changes the life of the student, Osman, who finds it. He falls in with a group that is also devoted to the religious tract, and when some of his new friends go missing, he embarks on a bus trip into the eastern part of Turkey to search for them.



My Name Is Red was published by Knopf in 2001. In its original Turkish-language edition, the work became the fastest-selling title in the history of Turkish literature. The story is set in sixteenth-century Turkey over a nine-day period, when a group of artists have gathered at the Sultan's palace. The ruler has commissioned them to illustrate his laudatory biography, but their task presents an unusual challenge, because Islam prohibits direct representation of the visual world. The plot is driven by a pair of murders that occur during their seclusion, and told through a series of shifting narrative voices, including a horse, a corpse, and even a coin.

Snow was published in 2002. It is a political thriller, set in a small village in Turkey, to which a poet, Ka, has ventured into in the guise of a journalist. Ka has recently returned to his homeland after spending a dozen years in political exile in Europe. The village has been the site of a number of suicides of young women, and Ka learns that the deaths were the result of the Turkish government's longstanding ban on the wearing of Islamic headscarves for women; Islamic extremists appeared to have played a role in stirring up religious fanaticism in the region.



In his *Istanbul. Memories and the City* Orhan Pamuk presents the reader the interesting story of the city of Istanbul he knows in a novel form, combining it with his own life story until the age of 22. This story, heads from Pamuk's first feelings related to 'his own' to his mother, his father and his family, and as a source of happiness and sadness, opens out to the streets of Istanbul.

Orhan Pamuk's recent novel the *Museum of Innocence* (2008) is a colorful and fabulous novel that will not only challenge the reader's thoughts about love, but also those about marriage, sex, passion, family, friendship, and happiness. The book tells the story of Kemal, son of a wealthy Istanbulite family, and his poor and distant relative Füsün, starting in 1975 and continuing up to the present. Beyond a fascinating and unforgettable love story told with an abundance of characters and incidents revealing the human soul's depths, the reader will also enjoy details about Turkey's social and cultural history in the past decades as well as the beauties of the author's native city Istanbul on the background...

To better understand Orhan Pamuk's literary contribution into the world's novel writing read one of the book reviews and make a report on what has been read. Find it here: <http://www.orhanpamuk.net/interviews.aspx>

An Interview with Orhan Pamuk

Before You Read

1. In the interview you'll find these word combinations. Make sure you know their meanings. Use a dictionary if necessary.

- intense elasticity (para 2)
- crude affair (para 4)
- heartfelt political agendas (para 5)
- political stance (para 5)
- moral commitment (para 5)
- humbling gesture (para 6)
- artsy engineer (para 7)
- self-imposed discipline (para 8)
- disquietude necessary (para 13)
- secular Westernized family

2. In the interview, you will find many proper names. Be sure you can pronounce them correctly and you know these ones.

Dostoyevsky	Diderot
Thomas Mann	Stendhal
Kafka	Conrad
Joyce	Proust - Proustian
Mallarmé	Jean-Paul Sartre

3. Explain the meanings of the following phrases. Use a dictionary if necessary.

- ...through the works of European novelists, especially Dostoyevsky, Thomas Mann, Kafka, and Joyce, you have gained your own insights about Europe and inevitably your love and devotion to the novel. (*para 1*)
- ... I imply that the art of the novel is well and kicking and that everyone from all over the world has access to and is using it. (*para 2*)
- ...to interiorize these problems and desires to express them on a political level. But once the author commits himself or herself to those problems, he or she is not a good novelist, because they take sides. They can't identify with everyone. (*para 5*)
- ... there is an essay called "*On My Name is Red*," which is a reflection on *My Name is Red*, one of your most popular novels. (*para 6*)
- ... I had worried that no one would be interested in my lovely miniaturists, unless I found some device to draw the reader in....(*para 6*)
- ...students will come to the realization in the end that when we entertain a thought in our minds it becomes an image,... (*para 8*)
- but I still believe young artists should not neglect the classical idea of craftsmanship (*para 10*)
- someone who didn't seem to have the hunger or disquietude necessary to give his life over to writing (*para 13*)

3. Translate into Ukrainian focusing on the phrases in italics.

Para 1:

- In the essay from "In Kars and Frankfurt," you wrote that "Mallarmé spoke the truth when he said, 'Everything in the world exists to be put into a book.' Without a doubt, the sort of *book best equipped to absorb everything in the world is the novel*." Similarly, in *The Black Book*, you have this wonderful phrase, "The world is a book." And in your marvelous introduction to *Tristram Shandy*, you talk about the novelist's ability to *bring paradise into the present*.

Para 2:

- The world, in so many ways, is so culturally globalized that our ways of seeing it are very similar to the post-Renaissance, let's say from the

invention of perspective in Italian and Dutch painting to the invention of photography and thereafter; we still see the world in a similar manner. We are *likewise all globalized in our literary imagination*, in the forms that we use, and I would say the literary globalization of the world had been completed years ago, when nobody was talking about globalization.

Para 3:

- *I think the art of the novel, as a form, is one of the great arts humanity has developed that has continuity, that changes and survives.* Over the last twenty years, we have witnessed a return to the 18th century Diderot kind of novel, which is a form that combines essays and novels together. Actually, *I consider myself a sort of a representative of that “encyclopedic” novel.* In other words, you can put anything into novels; novels are encyclopedias. Mallarmé’s words to that effect say that in the end, everything in the world, for the imaginative novelist or imaginative literary person, is in fact *made to end up in a book.* That’s how I see the world as well, because I am a novelist, and I care about the informative, encyclopedic quality of the novel.

Para 10:

- In the last hundred years or so, the idea of uniqueness and individuality is becoming more and more emphasized, so much so that we *tend to think less of past art.* Actually, the old masters were *less self-centered than we are now.* The idea that is, *as in conceptual art, a water bottle sitting on the table can be put in a frame and shown as art.*

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Para 12:

- Well, my anxiety was not in learning something in particular, but in putting together all my memories in the shape of a book. I ended up learning more about the process of going back to my history. *To some extent, writing an autobiography is deleting or editing out 95 percent of your life, and it’s such a painful process.* I have so many wonderful anecdotes of, let’s say, my primary school, which I share with everyone, but if I write all of them, I’d have to write another ten volumes.

Para 14:

- That said, my father being the son of a very rich family, I strongly felt that he did not want to *endure or live through the hardship* of a literary life during the late ’40s to mid-’50s, when that life would have been very tough, and it was considered a rich man’s fancy to be a writer. On the other hand he was an intelligent person who enjoyed books and had literary friends. He would also, behind their back but in a charming manner, *mock them* for only addressing a Turkish readership. Listening to my father—even at an early age—I had the impression that *an author should address not the national concerns, but all humanity.*

- (1) **Carol Becker:** I'd like to start by talking with you as a literary critic. It seems to me that there is an incredible sense of optimism in the way you write about other writers. In other words, through the works of European novelists, especially Dostoyevsky, Thomas Mann, Kafka, and Joyce, you have gained your own insights about Europe and inevitably your love and devotion to the novel. In the essay from "In Kars and Frankfurt," you wrote that "Mallarmé spoke the truth when he said, 'Everything in the world exists to be put into a book.' Without a doubt, the sort of book best equipped to absorb everything in the world is the novel." Similarly, in *The Black Book*, you have this wonderful phrase, "The world is a book." And in your marvelous introduction to *Tristram Shandy*, you talk about the novelist's ability to bring paradise into the present. Would you talk about the nature of the novel, and why you think it's capable of such vitality?
- (2) **Pamuk:** As we know, the novel, beginning in the 18th century, began to take over all the previous literary forms. In fact, we can even say it was the early form of globalization. The world, in so many ways, is so culturally globalized that our ways of seeing it are very similar to the post-Renaissance, let's say from the invention of perspective in Italian and Dutch painting to the invention of photography and thereafter; we still see the world in a similar manner. We are likewise all globalized in our literary imagination, in the forms that we use, and I would say the literary globalization of the world had been completed years ago, when nobody was talking about globalization. With this, I imply that the art of the novel is well and kicking and that everyone from all over the world has access to and is using it. It is now a common heritage of humanity. It has what I would call an *intense elasticity* in that it can absorb national problems and represent national dramas, so that you can use and impose your particular understanding of this form into your corner of the world, or discuss your national debate, whatever it is, such that it will hold the nation together, because it is a text that everyone can argue with.
- (3) Let me give you an example: I wrote *Snow*, a political novel, thinking everybody would be angry, and, yes, everyone was angry; but everyone was also reading, discussing and talking about it. I think the art of the novel, as a form, is one of the great arts humanity has developed that has continuity, that changes and survives. Over the last twenty years, we have witnessed a return to the 18th century Diderot kind of novel, which is a form that combines essays and novels together. Actually, I consider myself a sort of a representative of that "encyclopedic" novel. In other words, you can put anything into novels; novels are encyclopedias. Mallarmé's words to that effect say that in the end, everything in the world, for the imaginative novelist or imaginative literary person, is in fact made to end up in a book. That's how I see the world as well, because I am a novelist, and I care about the informative, encyclopedic quality of the novel.

- (4) **Becker:** You use a Stendhal quote from his *The Charterhouse of Parma* as the epigram for *Snow*. “Politics in the literary work are a pistol shot in the middle of a concert, a *crude affair* though one impossible to ignore. We are about to speak of very ugly matters.” It’s a great place to begin a political novel. Can you talk about why you think politics ruins the novel and why it is so difficult to create a really successful political novel?

Pamuk: There are so many problems with the political novel.

Becker: Of course, and yet you wrote one.

- (5) **Pamuk:** I wrote one, right, but I don’t think it is a great genre that produces masterpieces. It’s rather a limited genre, despite the fact that Dostoyevsky, Conrad, Stendhal and a few others produced the best examples of it. Still, it’s troubled by some inner contradictions. By that I mean when a novelist or an artist has *heartfelt political agendas* about prior political tension in some corner of the world where there is a highly dramatized and unstable political situation, he or she tends to interiorize these problems and desires to express them on a political level. But once the author commits himself or herself to those problems, he or she is not a good novelist, because they take sides. They can’t identify with everyone. They often have clear-cut good guys and bad guys, white guys and black guys, and so on. Once someone is morally committed to a *political stance*, it is almost impossible, or it is very problematic, to produce a satisfying, aesthetically convincing and “beautiful,” so to speak, novel. However, a few have managed to do that. Dostoyevsky’s *The Possessed*, sometimes translated as *The Demons*, is a great political novel in this sense. On the one hand, Dostoyevsky had in him the quality of believing angrily, with energy, in a social cause, getting angry about everyone; he had a nasty side to his spirit. He also had the unique ability, even in his anger, to identify with the bad guys. So it’s hard to be politically motivated and committed and write a novel that will not be damaged by the natural consequences of *moral commitment*, that is, inability to understand the “bad guy.” That is the fragile moment of the political novel. Although there have been a few classics, I think it can never be a major genre.

- (6) **Becker:** In your new book, *Other Colors: Selected Essays and A Story*, published last September, there is an essay called “*On My Name is Red*,” which is a reflection on *My Name is Red*, one of your most popular novels. You wrote, “As I was finishing the book, it seemed to me that the mystery plot, the detective story, was forced, that my heart wasn’t in it, but it was too late to make changes. I had worried that no one would be interested in my lovely miniaturists, unless I found some device to draw the reader in....” It’s as if you were being apologetic for the structure of the novel. I thought that was a *humbling gesture*. To shift the subject a bit, I know that your first love was painting, at least from the age of seven to twenty-two, and you also have an essay in this volume describing why you didn’t become an architect. Why did you become a writer as opposed to a painter or an architect?

- (7) **Pamuk:** First of all, the idea of wanting to become a painter, between the ages of seven and twenty-two, was encouraged by my family. I came from a family of civil engineers where my parents would say of my other siblings, “this one will go to the same school as his grandfather, the other the same school as his father and his uncle, but this one”—meaning me—“will be an architect,” which is a bit of an *artsy engineer*, or at least that’s what they thought at the time. Then I dropped out of school suddenly and began writing novels and stopped painting. Now, when people ask how I managed to establish myself as a Turkish novelist in my thirties, or why I gave up painting and architecture, I look at them like a deer in headlights because I don’t have one single answer for them. In fact, if you read Istanbul, my memoir, it explains everything in detail about that turn in my life.
- (8) Secondly, I had learned at an early age that painting requires *self-imposed discipline* and solitude, which is in many ways quite identical to writing and suits my temperament. But now, as I get older, I return back to my childhood by writing more about the visual arts. Actually, I’m teaching a course with Andreas Huyssen which is a sort of survey of the history of the relationship between words and images in humanities, exploring essential points about the differences and shared problems of painting and literature. I hope that students will come to the realization in the end that when we entertain a thought in our minds it becomes an image, which can then be translated into pictures or written words. That is, our minds work in such a way that what we call thoughts or ideas are made up of a combination of words and pictures. I also feel the need to *bring up the history of Islamic art*, which is so heavily embedded in the idea that the *Koran* prohibits the use of images, yet the Ottoman sultans didn’t care about that. They made paintings inside books, finding all kinds of excuses to do so. That in itself is an interesting subject.
- (9) **Becker:** It’s especially interesting because increasingly with young art students who want to manifest ideas and work between forms, it’s a question of the appropriate form or inventing forms, which is a different matter altogether. They seem to be more and more interested in what form will best suit their ideas, concepts, or missions. In the future, with an increased availability of media and technology of all forms early on in the progression of an artist’s education—film, video, animation, computer-generated images and so on—we are going to see more of this overlap of form.
- (10) **Pamuk:** I do have sympathy for that kind of representation, but I still believe young artists should not neglect the classical idea of craftsmanship. The hand should be trained before the mind, especially in painting. In the last hundred years or so, the idea of uniqueness and individuality is becoming more and more emphasized, so much so that we tend to think less of past art. Actually, the old masters were less self-centered than we are now. The idea that is, as in

conceptual art, a water bottle sitting on the table can be put in a frame and shown as art.

- (11) **Becker:** In *Istanbul*, which I read with such delight because it reminded me so much of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*: it reveals the process of how someone becomes a writer. For me, the book is about the ways in which an imagination is challenged for an entire childhood, and at the very end declares, "This imagination will be a writer." It's an amazing Proustian moment. The book ends with your decision to become a writer. But of course the writer has written everything we have read so far. What did you learn while writing that book?
- (12) **Pamuk:** Well, my anxiety was not in learning something in particular, but in putting together all my memories in the shape of a book. I ended up learning more about the process of going back to my history. To some extent, writing an autobiography is deleting or editing out 95 percent of your life, and it's such a painful process. I have so many wonderful anecdotes of, let's say, my primary school, which I share with everyone, but if I write all of them, I'd have to write another ten volumes.
- (13) **Becker:** The Nobel speech "*My Father's Suitcase*," included in the recent book, is a beautiful tribute to your father. His temperament was such that you say, "He was too comfortable in his skin, too assured about the future ever to be gripped by the essential passions of literary creativity." He would say to you, "Life is not something to be earned, but to be enjoyed." In some sense, this is your explanation for why he did not pursue the sort of literary career that you have, even though he wrote. You present him as someone who didn't seem to have the hunger or *disquietude necessary* to give his life over to writing. Then also you present the wonderful notion that we don't really want to know the interior lives of our parents, that our own narcissism precludes our desire to understand them as anything other than our parents. Could you talk a bit more about your father?
- (14) **Pamuk:** Well, on the one hand, my father's father was a very rich man, and that made life easier for him. He came from a *secular Westernized family* who had enjoyed the first two or three decades of the Modern Turkish Republic. They strongly believed in Turkish Nationalism and Turkish Occidentalism, that is Westernization, which they thought of as a path towards civilization. That said, my father being the son of a very rich family, I strongly felt that he did not want to endure or live through the hardship of a literary life during the late '40s to mid-'50s, when that life would have been very tough, and it was considered a rich man's fancy to be a writer. On the other hand he was an intelligent person who enjoyed books and had literary friends. He would also, behind their back but in a charming manner, mock them for only addressing a Turkish readership. Listening to my father—even at an early age—I had the impression that an author should address not the national concerns, but all humanity. When he was

bored with us at home, he would often travel to Paris, stay in hotel rooms, and fill pages and pages of notebooks, which he gave me just before he died. I remember him saying to me and my brother, with a laugh, “Well you guys have to work hard. I was privileged but there’s no money left, children. Too bad.” But he did this in such a graceful, kind manner that you liked the man for even saying it. He had an immense and excellent library and cared about Jean-Paul Sartre instead of Pashas and Saints in Turkey. It inspires me to think similarly, that I should take a modern writer as a secular saint, one I’ve decided I want to be like. My father had tremendous confidence in my brother and I, which we took for granted. I would draw a line and he would say, “Oh, this is genius!” Not because he really believed I was a genius, as I sometimes thought. He believed in himself so much that he thought only a genius’s son could do such a thing. But he gave me the self-confidence that I needed.

by Carol Becker

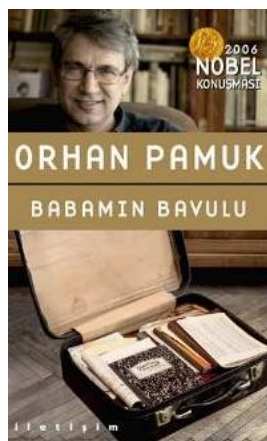
Available at: <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2008/02/express/orhan-pamuk-wih-carol-becker>

Orhan Pamuk “My Father’s Suitcase”

Before You Read

1. To better understand this first-person revelation read the book review below:

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Orhan Pamuk gave a speech called “My Father’s Suitcase” when he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in December 2006. This emotional speech which sincerely conveys the spirit of Pamuk’s thirty two years of writing effort, had a deep, worldwide impact. This book combines “My Father’s Suitcase” which is a basic text about writing and living with Pamuk’s two other speeches in which the same subjects and problems are discussed from other perspectives. “The Implied Author”, the speech that Pamuk gave when he received the Puterbaugh Prize given by *World Literature* magazine, in April 2006 is about the psychology of writing and the urge and adventure of being a writer. Pamuk’s other speech, “In Kars and in Frankfurt” that was given when he received the Peace Prize given by the German Publishers Associations in October 2005 is investigating the power of the writer to put himself in another’s place and the political consequences of this very natural human talent. *My Father’s Suitcase* consists of three speeches that are seen as a whole by their writer.

It’s a unique, personal book on what writing is, how to become a writer, life and writing, the writer’s patience and the secrets of the art of novel writing...

Available at <http://www.orhanpamuk.net/book.aspx?id=93&lng=eng>

2. As you may have noticed the narrative you are going to read has a psychological theme. Read these quotes, and say why the writers write?

I write for the same reason I breathe – because if I didn't, I would die. – Isaac Asimov.

If I don't write to empty my mind, I go mad. – Lord Byron

I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear. – Chuck Palahniuk

While reading My Father's Suitcase underline the similes Sakumi uses to describe people and things. What characteristic of this or that object does the narrator emphasize with the aid of this stylistic device?

My Father's Suitcase

Orhan Pamuk's 2006 Nobel Acceptance Speech

Two years before his death, my father gave me a small suitcase filled with his writings, manuscripts and notebooks. Assuming his usual joking, mocking air, he told me he wanted me to read them after he was gone, by which he meant after he died.

'Just take a look,' he said, looking slightly embarrassed. 'See if there's anything inside that you can use. Maybe after I'm gone you can make a selection and publish it.'

We were in my study, surrounded by books. My father was searching for a place to set down the suitcase, *wandering back and forth like a man who wished to rid himself of a painful burden*. In the end, he deposited it quietly in an *unobtrusive corner*¹. It was a shaming moment that neither of us ever forgot, but once it had passed and we had gone back into our usual roles, taking life lightly, our joking, mocking personas **took over** and we relaxed. We talked as we always did, about the trivial things of everyday life, and Turkey's neverending political troubles, and my father's mostly failed business ventures, without feeling too much sorrow.

I remember that after my father left, I spent several days walking back and forth past the suitcase without once touching it. I was already familiar with this small, black, leather suitcase, and its lock, and its rounded corners. My father **would** take it with him on short trips and sometimes use it to carry documents to work. I remembered that when I was a child, and my father came home from a trip, I **would** open this little suitcase and *rummage through*² his things, savouring the *scent of cologne*³ and foreign countries. This suitcase was a familiar friend, a powerful reminder of my

¹ *Unobtrusive corner* – малопомітний куток

² *to rummage through* – ретельно перебирати

³ *scent of cologne* – запах одеколону

childhood, my past, but now I couldn't even touch it. Why? No doubt it was because of the mysterious weight of its contents.

I am now going to speak of this weight's meaning. It is what a person creates when he shuts himself up in a room, sits down at a table, and retires to a corner to express his thoughts – that is, the meaning of literature.

When I did touch my father's suitcase, I still could not *bring myself to open it*⁴, but I did know what was inside some of those notebooks. I had seen my father writing things in a few of them. This was not the first time I had heard of the heavy load inside the suitcase. My father had a large library; in his youth, in the late 1940s, he had wanted to be an Istanbul poet, and had translated Valéry into Turkish, but he had not wanted to live the sort of life that came with writing poetry in a poor country with few readers. My father's father – my grandfather – had been a wealthy business man; my father had led a comfortable life as a child and a young man, and he had no wish to *endure hardship for the sake of literature*⁵, for writing. He loved life with all its beauties – this I understood.

The first thing that kept me distant from the contents of my father's suitcase was, of course, the fear that I might not like what I read. Because my father knew this, he had taken the precaution of acting as if he did not take its contents seriously. After working as a writer for 25 years, it pained me to see this. But I did not even want to be angry at my father for failing to take literature seriously enough ... My real fear, the crucial thing that I did not wish to know or discover, was the possibility that my father might be a good writer. I couldn't open my father's suitcase because I feared this. Even worse, I couldn't even admit this myself openly. If true and great literature emerged from my father's suitcase, I would have to acknowledge that inside my father there existed an entirely different man. This was a frightening possibility. Because even at my advanced age I wanted my father to be only my father – not a writer.

A writer is someone who spends years patiently trying to discover the second being inside him, and the world that makes him who he is: when I speak of writing, what comes first to my mind is not a novel, a poem, or literary tradition, it is a person who shuts himself up in a room, sits down at a table, and alone, *turns inward*⁶; amid its shadows, he builds a new world with words. This man – or this woman – may use a typewriter, profit from the ease of a computer, or write with a pen on paper, as I have done for 30 years. As he writes, he can drink tea or coffee, or smoke cigarettes. From time to time he may rise from his table to look out through the window at the children playing in the street, and, if he is lucky, at trees and a view, or he can gaze out at a black wall. He can write poems, plays, or novels, as I do. All these differences come after the crucial task of sitting down at the table and patiently turning inwards. *To write is to turn this inward gaze into words, to study the world into which that person*

⁴ *bring myself to open it* – примусити себе його відчинити

⁵ *endure hardship for the sake of literature* – терпіти злидні заради літератури

⁶ *to turn inward* – заглиблюватися у себе

passes when he *retires into himself*⁷, and to do so with patience, obstinacy, and joy. As I sit at my table, for days, months, years, slowly adding new words to the empty page, I feel as if I am creating a new world, as if I am bringing into being that other person inside me, in the same way someone might build a bridge or a dome, stone by stone. The stones we writers use are words. As we hold them in our hands, sensing the ways in which each of them is connected to the others, looking at them sometimes from afar, sometimes almost *caressing them with our fingers*⁸ and the tips of our pens, weighing them, moving them around, year in and year out, patiently and hopefully, we create new worlds.

The writer's secret is not inspiration – for it is never clear where it comes from – it is his stubbornness, his patience. That lovely Turkish saying – *to dig a well with a needle* – seems to me to have been said with writers in mind. In the old stories, I love the patience of Ferhat, who digs through mountains for his love – and I understand it, too. In my novel, *My Name is Red*, when I wrote about the old Persian miniaturists who had drawn the same horse with the same passion for so many years, memorising each stroke, that they could recreate that beautiful horse even with their eyes closed, I knew I was talking about the writing profession, and my own life. If a writer is to tell his own story – tell it slowly, and as if it were a story about other people – if he is to feel the power of the story rise up inside him, if he is to sit down at a table and patiently **give himself over** to this art – this craft – he must first have been given some hope. The angel of inspiration (who pays regular visits to some and rarely calls on others) favours the hopeful and the confident, and it is when a writer feels most lonely, when he feels most doubtful about his efforts, his dreams, and the value of his writing – when he thinks his story is only his story – it is at such moments that the angel chooses to reveal to him stories, images and dreams that will draw out the world he wishes to build. If I think back on the books to which I have devoted my entire life, I am most surprised by those moments when I have felt as if the sentences, dreams, and pages that have made me so ecstatically happy have not come from my own imagination – that another power has found them and generously presented them to me.

I was afraid of opening my father's suitcase and reading his notebooks because I knew that *he* would not tolerate the difficulties I had endured, that it was not solitude he loved but mixing with friends, crowds, salons, jokes, company. But later my thoughts took a different turn. These thoughts, these *dreams of renunciation*⁹ and patience, were prejudices I had derived from my own life and my own experience as a writer. There were plenty of brilliant writers who wrote surrounded by crowds and family life, in the glow of company and happy chatter. In addition, my father had, when we were young, tired of the monotony of family life, and left us to go to Paris, where – like so many writers – he'd sat in his hotel room filling notebooks. I knew, too, that some of those very notebooks were in this suitcase, because during the years before he brought it to me, my father had finally begun to talk to me about that period

⁷ *retires into himself* – заглиблюватися у себе

⁸ *to caress smth with ones fingers* – пестити пальцями

⁹ *dreams of renunciation* – мрії про самозречення

in his life. He spoke about those years even when I was a child, but *he would not mention his vulnerabilities*¹⁰, his dreams of becoming a writer, or the questions of identity that had *plagued*¹¹ him in his hotel room. He would tell me instead about all the times he'd seen Sartre on the pavements of Paris, about the books he'd read and the films he'd seen, all with the *elated sincerity*¹² of someone imparting very important news. When I became a writer, I never forgot that it was partly thanks to the fact that I had a father who would talk of world writers so much more than he spoke of pashas or great religious leaders. So perhaps I had to read my father's notebooks with this in mind, and remembering how indebted I was to his large library. I had to bear in mind that when he was living with us, my father, like me, enjoyed being alone with his books and his thoughts – and not pay too much attention to the literary quality of his writing.

But as I gazed so anxiously at the suitcase my *father had bequeathed me*¹³, I also felt that this was the very thing I would not be able to do. My father would sometimes stretch out on the divan in front of his books, abandon the book in his hand, or the magazine and drift off into a dream, lose himself for the longest time in his thoughts. When I saw on his face an expression so very different from the one he wore amid the joking, teasing, and bickering of family life – when I saw the first signs of an inward gaze – I would, especially during my childhood and my early youth, understand, *with trepidation*¹⁴, that he was discontent. Now, so many years later, I know that this discontent is the basic trait that turns a person into a writer. To become a writer, *patience and toil*¹⁵ are not enough: we must first feel compelled to escape crowds, company, the stuff of ordinary, everyday life, and shut ourselves up in a room. We wish for patience and hope so that we can create a deep world in our writing. But the desire to shut oneself up in a room is what pushes us into action. The *precursor*¹⁶ of this sort of independent writer – who reads his books to his heart's content, and who, by listening only to the voice of his own conscience, disputes with other's words, who, by entering into conversation with his books develops his own thoughts, and his own world – was most certainly Montaigne, in the earliest days of modern literature. Montaigne was a writer to whom my father returned often, a writer he recommended to me. I would like to see myself as belonging to the tradition of writers who – wherever they are in the world, in the East or in the West – cut themselves off from society, and shut themselves up with their books in their room. The starting point of true literature is the man who shuts himself up in his room with his books.

But once we shut ourselves away, we soon discover that we are not as alone as we thought. We are in the company of the words of those who came before us, of other people's stories, other people's books, other people's words, the thing we call

¹⁰ *he would not mention his vulnerabilities* – він ніколи не говорив про свою вразливість

¹¹ *to plague somebody* – мучити будь-кого

¹² *elated sincerity* – піднесена відвертість

¹³ *father had bequeathed me* – який заповідав мій батько

¹⁴ *with trepidation* – із трепетом

¹⁵ *patience and toil* – терпіння та важка праця

¹⁶ *precursor* - предтеча, попередник

tradition. I believe literature to be the most *valuable hoard*¹⁷ that humanity has gathered in its quest to understand itself. Societies, tribes, and peoples grow more intelligent, richer, and more advanced as they pay attention to the troubled words of their authors, and, as we all know, the burning of books and the *denigration of writers*¹⁸ are both signals that dark and *improvident times*¹⁹ are upon us. But literature is never just a national concern. The writer who shuts himself up in a room and first goes on a journey inside himself will, **over** the years, discover literature's eternal rule: he must have the artistry to tell his own stories as if they were other people's stories, and to tell other people's stories as if they were his own, for this is what literature is. But we must first travel through other people's stories and books.

My father had a good library – 1 500 volumes in all – more than enough for a writer. By the age of 22, I had perhaps not read them all, but I was familiar with each book – I knew which were important, which were light but easy to read, which were classics, which an essential part of any education, which were forgettable but amusing accounts of local history, and which French authors my father rated very highly. Sometimes I would look at this library from a distance and imagine that one day, in a different house, I would build my own library, an even better library – build myself a world. When I looked at my father's library from afar, it seemed to me to be a small picture of the real world. But this was a world seen from our own corner, from Istanbul. The library was evidence of this. My father had built his library from his trips abroad, mostly with books from Paris and America, but also with books bought from the shops that sold books in foreign languages in the 40s and 50s and Istanbul's old and new booksellers, whom I also knew. My world is a mixture of the local – the national – and the West. In the 70s, I, too, began, somewhat ambitiously, to build my own library. I had not quite decided to become a writer – as I related in Istanbul, I had come to feel that I would not, after all, become a painter, but I was not sure what path my life would take. There was inside me a *relentless curiosity*²⁰, a hope-driven desire to read and learn, but at the same time I felt that my life was in some way lacking, that I would not be able to live like others. Part of this feeling was connected to what I felt when I gazed at my father's library – to be living far from the centre of things, as all of us who lived in Istanbul in those days were made to feel, that feeling of living in the provinces. There was another reason for feeling anxious and somehow lacking, for I knew only too well that I lived in a country that showed little interest in its artists – be they painters or writers – and that gave them no hope. In the 70s, when I would take the money my father gave me and greedily buy faded, dusty, dog-eared books from Istanbul's old booksellers, I would be as affected by the *pitiabile state*²¹ of these second-hand bookstores – and by the *despairing dishevelment of the poor*,

¹⁷ *valuable hoard* – цінне надбання

¹⁸ *denigration of writers* – наклепи письменників

¹⁹ *improvident times* - непередбачливі часи

²⁰ *relentless curiosity* - невтомна допитливість

²¹ *pitiabile state* – жалюгідний стан-

*bedraggled booksellers*²² who laid out their wares on roadsides, in *mosque courtyards*²³, and in the niches of crumbling walls – as I was by their books.

As for my place in the world – in life, as in literature, my basic feeling was that I was 'not in the centre'. In the centre of the world, there was a life richer and more exciting than our own, and with all of Istanbul, all of Turkey, I was outside it. Today I think that I share this feeling with most people in the world. In the same way, there was a world literature, and its centre, too, was very far away from me. Actually what I had in mind was Western, not world, literature, and we Turks were outside it. My father's library was evidence of this. At one end, there were Istanbul's books – our literature, our local world, in all its beloved detail – and at the other end were the books from this other, Western, world, to which our own *bore no resemblance*, to which our lack of resemblance gave us both pain and hope. To write, to read, was like leaving one world to find consolation in the other world's otherness, the strange and the wondrous. I felt that my father had read novels to escape his life and flee to the West – just as I would do later. Or it seemed to me that books in those days were things we picked up to escape our own culture, which we found so lacking. It wasn't just by reading that we left our Istanbul lives to travel West – it was by writing, too. To fill those notebooks of his, my father had gone to Paris, shut himself up in his room, and then brought his writings back to Turkey. As I gazed at my father's suitcase, it seemed to me that this was what was causing me disquiet. After working in a room for 25 years to survive as a writer in Turkey, *it galled me*²⁴ to see my father hide his deep thoughts inside this suitcase, to act as if writing was work that had to be done in secret, far from the eyes of society, the state, the people. Perhaps this was the main reason why I felt angry at my father for not taking literature as seriously as I did.

Actually I was angry at my father because he had not led a life like mine, because he had never quarrelled with his life, and had spent his life happily laughing with his friends and his loved ones. But part of me knew that I could also say that I was not so much 'angry' as 'jealous', that the second word was more accurate, and this, too, *made me uneasy*²⁵. That would be when I *would ask myself in my usual scornful, angry voice*: 'What is happiness?' Was happiness thinking that I lived a deep life in that lonely room? Or was happiness leading a comfortable life in society, believing in the same things as everyone else, or acting as if you did? Was it happiness, or unhappiness, to go through life writing in secret, while seeming to be in harmony with all around one? But these were overly ill-tempered questions. Wherever had I got this idea that the measure of a good life was happiness? People, papers, everyone acted as if the most important measure of a life was happiness. Did this alone not suggest that it might be worth trying to find out if the exact opposite was true? After all, my father had run away from his family so many times – how well did I know him, and how well could I say I understood his disquiet?

²² *despairing dishevelment of the poor, bedraggled booksellers -*

²³ *mosque courtyards – двір мечеті*

²⁴ *it galled me – це дратувало мене*

²⁵ *made me uneasy – бентежило мене*

So this was what was driving me when I first opened my father's suitcase. Did my father have a secret, an unhappiness in his life about which I knew nothing, something he could only endure by pouring it into his writing? As soon as I opened the suitcase, I recalled its scent of travel, recognised several notebooks, and noted that my father had shown them to me years earlier, but without *dwelling on them*²⁶ very long. Most of the notebooks I now took into my hands he had filled when he had left us and gone to Paris as a young man. Whereas I, like so many writers I admired – writers whose biographies I had read – wished to know what my father had written, and what he had thought, when he was the age I was now. It did not take me long to realise that I would find nothing like that here. What caused me most disquiet was when, here and there in my father's notebooks, I *came upon a writerly voice*²⁷. This was not my father's voice, I told myself; it wasn't authentic, or at least it did not belong to the man I'd known as my father. Underneath my fear that my father might not have been my father when he wrote, was a deeper fear: the fear that deep inside I was not authentic, that I would find nothing good in my father's writing, this increased my fear of finding my father to have been *overly*²⁸ influenced by other writers and *plunged me into a despair*²⁹ that had *afflicted me*³⁰ so badly when I was young, casting my life, my very being, my desire to write, and my work into question. During my first ten years as a writer, I felt these anxieties more deeply, and even as I fought them off, I would sometimes fear that one day, I would have to admit to defeat – just as I had done with painting – and *succumbing to disquiet*³¹, give up novel writing, too.

I have already mentioned the two essential feelings that rose up in me as I closed my father's suitcase and put it away: the sense of being *marooned in the provinces*³², and the fear that *I lacked authenticity*³³. This was certainly not the first time they had made themselves felt. For years I had, in my reading and my writing, been studying, discovering, deepening these emotions, in all their variety and unintended consequences, their nerve endings, their triggers, and their many colours. Certainly my spirits had been jarred by the confusions, the sensitivities and the fleeting pains that life and books had sprung on me, most often as a young man. But it was only by writing books that I came to a fuller understanding of the problems of authenticity (as in *My Name is Red* and *The Black Book*) and the problems of life on the periphery (as in *Snow* and *Istanbul*). For me, to be a writer is to acknowledge the secret wounds that we carry inside us, the wounds so secret that we ourselves are barely aware of them, and to patiently explore them, know them, illuminate them, to own these pains and wounds, and to make them a conscious part of our spirits and our writing.

²⁶ *dwelling on them* — докладно спинятися на...

²⁷ *came upon a writerly voice* – несподівано натрапив на голос письменника

²⁸ *overly* - надто, надмірно

²⁹ *to plunge into a despair* – впадати в розпач

³⁰ *afflicted me* - засмучувати; завдавати болю; турбувати, непокоїти, тривожити

³¹ *to succumb to disquiet* – піддатися хвилюванню

³² *to maroon in the provinces* - байдикувати у галузі (своїй професії)

³³ *I lacked authenticity* – мені бракує справжності

A writer talks of things that everyone knows but does not know they know. To explore this knowledge, and to watch it grow, is a pleasurable thing; the reader is visiting a world at once familiar and miraculous. When a writer shuts himself up in a room for years on end *to hone his craft*³⁴ – to create a world – if he uses his secret wounds as his starting point, he is, whether he knows it or not, putting a great faith in humanity. My confidence comes from the belief that all human beings resemble each other, that others carry wounds like mine – that they will therefore understand. All true literature rises from this childish, hopeful certainty that all people resemble each other. When a writer shuts himself up in a room for years on end, with this gesture he suggests a single humanity, a world without a centre.

But as can be seen from my father's suitcase and the pale colours of our lives in Istanbul, the world did have a centre, and it was far away from us. In my books I have described in some detail how this basic fact evoked a Chekovian sense of provinciality, and how, by another route, it led to my questioning my authenticity. I know from experience that the great majority of people on this earth live with these same feelings, and that many suffer from an even deeper sense of insufficiency, lack of security and sense of degradation, than I do. Yes, the greatest dilemmas facing humanity are still landlessness, homelessness, and hunger ... But today our televisions and newspapers tell us about these fundamental problems more quickly and more simply than literature can ever do. What literature needs most to tell and investigate today are humanity's basic fears: the fear of being left outside, and the fear of counting for nothing не иметь никакого значения, не идти в счёт сводить на нет, and the feelings of worthlessness that come with such fears; the collective humiliations унижение, vulnerabilities уязвимость; ранимость, slights проявление пренебрежительного равнодушия; неуважение, пренебрежение, игнорирование, grievances Обида; недовольство, sensitivities а) чувствительность б) восприимчивость в) сенситивность 2) а) обидчивость б) шепетильность, and imagined insults, and the nationalist boasts and inflations that are their next of kind ... Whenever I am confronted by such sentiments, and by the irrational, overstated language in which they are usually expressed, I know they touch on a darkness inside me. We have often witnessed peoples, societies and nations outside the Western world – and I can identify with them easily – succumbing to fears that sometimes lead them to commit stupidities, all because of their fears of humiliation and their sensitivities. I also know that in the West – a world with which I can identify with the same ease – nations and peoples taking an excessive pride in their wealth, and in their having brought us the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and Modernism, have, from time to time, succumbed to a self-satisfaction that is almost as stupid.

This means that my father was not the only one, that we all give too much importance to the idea of a world with a centre. Whereas the thing that compels us to shut ourselves up to write in our rooms for years on end is a faith in the opposite; the belief that one day our writings will be read and understood, because people **all the world over** resemble each other. But this, as I know from my own and my father's writing, is a troubled optimism, scarred by the anger of being consigned to the

³⁴ *to hone his craft*³⁴ - відточувати свою майстерність

margins, of being left outside. The love and hate that Dostoyevsky felt towards the West all his life – I have felt this too, on many occasions. But if I have grasped an essential truth, if I have cause for optimism, it is because I have travelled with this great writer through his love-hate relationship with the West, *to behold the other world*³⁵ he has built on the other side.

All writers who have devoted their lives to this task know this reality: whatever our original purpose, the world that we create after years and years of hopeful writing, will, in the end, move to other very different places. It will take us far away from the table at which we have worked with sadness or anger, take us to the other side of that sadness and anger, into another world. Could my father have not reached such a world himself? Like the land that slowly begins to take shape, slowly rising from the mist in all its colours like an island after a long sea journey, this other world *enchants us*³⁶. We are as *beguiled*³⁷ as the western travellers who voyaged from the south to behold Istanbul rising from the mist. At the end of a journey begun in hope and curiosity, there lies before them a city of mosques and minarets, a medley of houses, streets, hills, bridges, and slopes, an entire world. Seeing it, we wish to enter into this world and lose ourselves inside it, just as we might a book. After sitting down at a table because we felt provincial, excluded, on the margins, angry, or deeply melancholic, we have found an entire world beyond these sentiments.

What I feel now is the opposite of what I felt as a child and a young man: for me the centre of the world is Istanbul. This is not just because I have lived there all my life, but because, for the last 33 years, I have been narrating its streets, its bridges, its people, its dogs, its houses, its mosques, its fountains, its strange heroes, its shops, its famous characters, its dark spots, its days and its nights, making them part of me, embracing them all. A point arrived when this world I had made with my own hands, this world that existed only in my head, was more real to me than the city in which I actually lived. That was when all these people and streets, objects and buildings would seem to begin to talk amongst themselves, and begin to interact in ways I had not anticipated, as if they lived not just in my imagination or my books, but for themselves. This world that I had created like a man digging a well with a needle would then seem truer than all else.

My father might also have discovered this kind of happiness during the years he spent writing, I thought as I gazed at my father's suitcase: I should not prejudge him. I was so grateful to him, after all: he'd never been a commanding, forbidding, overpowering, punishing, ordinary father, but a father who always left me free, always showed me the utmost respect. I had often thought that if I had, from time to time, been able to draw from my imagination, be it in freedom or childishness, it was because, unlike so many of my friends from childhood and youth, I had no fear of my father, and I had sometimes believed very deeply that I had been able to become a

³⁵ *to behold the other world* – побачити інший світ

³⁶ *to enchant somebody* – зачаровувати будь-кого

³⁷ *to beguile* - розважати, забавляти

writer because my father had, in his youth, wished to be one, too. I had to read him with tolerance – seek to understand what he had written in those hotel rooms.

It was with these hopeful thoughts that I **walked over** to the suitcase, which was still sitting where my father had left it; using all my willpower, I read through a few manuscripts and notebooks. What had my father written about? I recall a few views from the windows of Parisian hotels, a few poems, paradoxes, analyses ... As I write I feel like someone who has just been in a traffic accident and is struggling to remember how it happened, while at the same time *dreading the prospect*³⁸ of remembering too much. When I was a child, and my father and mother *were on the brink of a quarrel*³⁹ – when they fell into one of those deadly silences – my father would at once turn on the radio, to change the mood, and the music would help us forget it all faster.

Let me change the mood with a few sweet words that will, I hope, serve as well as that music. As you know, the question we writers are asked most often, the favourite question, is; why do you write? I write because I have an *innate need*⁴⁰ to write! I write because I can't do normal work like other people. I write because I want to read books like the ones I write. I write because I am angry at all of you, angry at everyone. I write because I love sitting in a room all day writing. I write because I can only partake in real life by changing it. I write because I want others, all of us, the whole world, to know what sort of life we lived, and continue to live, in Istanbul, in Turkey. I write because I love the smell of paper, pen, and ink. I write because I believe in literature, in the art of the novel, more than I believe in anything else. I write because it is a habit, a passion. I write because I am afraid of being forgotten. I write because I like the glory and interest that writing brings. I write to be alone. Perhaps I write because I hope to understand why I am so very, very angry at all of you, so very, very angry at everyone. I write because I like to be read. I write because once I have begun a novel, an essay, a page, I want to finish it. I write because everyone expects me to write. I write because I have a childish belief in the immortality of libraries, and in the way my books sit on the shelf. I write because it is exciting to turn all of life's beauties and riches into words. I write not to tell a story, but to compose a story. I write because I wish to escape from the foreboding that there is a place I must go but – just as in a dream – I can't quite get there. I write because I have never managed to be happy. I write to be happy.

A week after he came to my office and left me his suitcase, my father came to pay me another visit; as always, he brought me a bar of chocolate (he had forgotten I was 48 years old). As always, we chatted and laughed about life, politics and family gossip. A moment arrived when my father's eyes went to the corner where he had left his suitcase and saw that I had moved it. We looked each other in the eye. There followed a pressing silence. I did not tell him that I had opened the suitcase and tried to read its contents; instead I looked away. But he understood. Just as I understood

³⁸ *dreading the prospect* – жахатися від перспективи

³⁹ *were on the brink of a quarrel* – бути на краю сварки

⁴⁰ *innate need*⁴⁰ природна потреба

that he had understood. Just as he understood that I had understood that he had understood. But all this understanding only went so far as it can go in a few seconds. Because my father was a happy, easygoing man who had faith in himself: he smiled at me the way he always did. And as he left the house, he repeated all the lovely and encouraging things that he always said to me, like a father.

As always, I watched him leave, envying his happiness, his carefree and *unflappable temperament*⁴¹. But I remember that on that day there was also a flash of joy inside me that made me ashamed. It was prompted by the thought that maybe I wasn't as comfortable in life as he was, maybe I had not led as happy or footloose a life as he had, but that I had devoted it to writing – you've understood ... I was ashamed to be thinking such things at my father's expense. Of all people, my father, who had never been the source of my pain – who had left me free. All this should remind us that writing and literature are intimately linked to a lack at the centre of our lives, and to our feelings of happiness and guilt.

But my story has a symmetry that immediately reminded me of something else that day, and that brought me an even deeper sense of guilt. Twenty-three years before my father left me his suitcase, and four years after I had decided, aged 22, to become a novelist, and, abandoning all else, shut myself up in a room, I finished my first novel, *Cevdet Bey and Sons*; with trembling hands I had given my father a typescript of the still unpublished novel, so that he could read it and tell me what he thought. This was not simply because I had confidence in his taste and his intellect: his opinion was very important to me because he, unlike my mother, had not opposed my wish to become a writer. At that point, my father was not with us, but far away. I waited impatiently for his return. When he arrived two weeks later, I ran to open the door. My father said nothing, but he at once threw his arms around me in a way that told me he had liked it very much. For a while, *we were plunged into the sort of awkward silence*⁴² that so often accompanies moments of great emotion. Then, when we had calmed down and begun to talk, my father resorted to highly charged and exaggerated language to express his confidence in me or my first novel: he told me that one day I would win the prize that I am here to receive with such great happiness.

He said this not because he was trying to convince me of his good opinion, or to set this prize as a goal; he said it like a Turkish father, giving support to his son, encouraging him by saying, 'One day you'll become a pasha!' For years, whenever he saw me, he would encourage me with the same words.

My father died in December 2002.

Today, as I stand before the Swedish Academy and the distinguished members who have awarded me this great prize – this great honour – and their distinguished guests, I dearly wish he could be amongst us.

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⁴¹ *unflappable temperament*

⁴² *we were plunged into the sort of awkward silence* – *запанувала так звана незручна тиша*

After You Read

1. Suggest a quote from *My Father's Suitcase* to formulate Orhan Pamuk's reason to write.
2. a) Revise the usage of *would* for past habits

Would is used to talk about past habits and typical characteristics

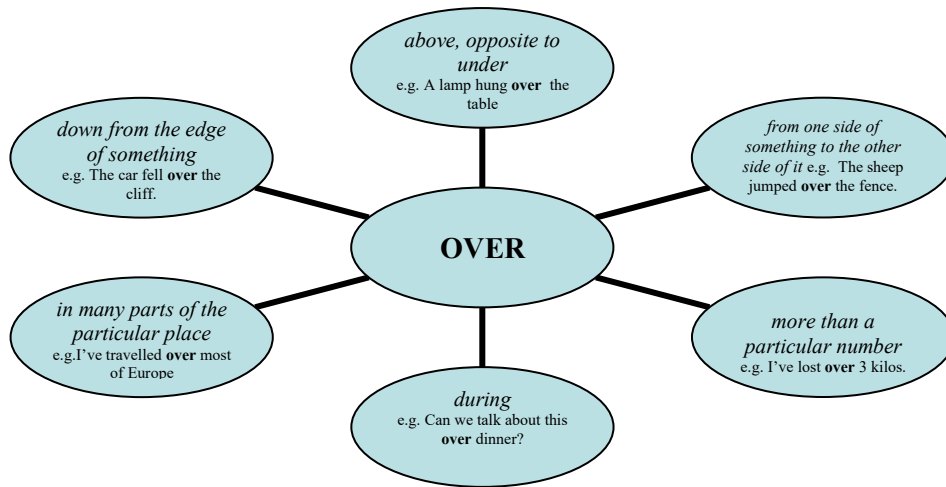
e.g. Sometimes he *would* bring me little presents without saying why

b) Paraphrase the following sentences:

1. Still, the glass wall that came between My father *would* sometimes stretch out on the divan in front of his books, abandon the book in his hand, or the magazine and drift off into a dream, lose himself for the longest time in his thoughts.
2. When I saw on his face an expression so very different from the one he wore amid the joking, teasing, and bickering of family life – when I saw the first signs of an inward gaze – I *would*, especially during my childhood and my early youth, understand, with trepidation, that he was discontent.
3. Sometimes I *would* look at this library from a distance and imagine that one day, in a different house, I would build my own library, an even better library – build myself a world.
4. During my first ten years as a writer, I felt these anxieties more deeply, and even as I fought them off, I *would* sometimes fear that one day, I would have to admit to defeat.
5. When I was a child, and my father and mother were on the brink of a quarrel – when they fell into one of those deadly silences – my father *would* at once turn on the radio, to change the mood, and the music *would* help us forget it all faster.
6. For years, whenever he saw me, he *would* encourage me with the same words.

3. Develop your way with words:

a. *Over* is one of the common words in the English language. It has a number of various meanings. Here are some of the uses.



b. Consider collocations with *over* from the text. Write their meanings:

- Take over
- Give oneself over to
- All the world over
- Walk over

c. Using your dictionary, find other uses of *over*. Complete the diagram above.

Exploring Other Sources: Orhan Pamuk

Exploring various sources find and read the information about Orhan Pamuk's most famous novels, or their summaries, and say whether the author is consistent in implementing literature's basic needs, i.e. investigating and reflecting the humanity's basic fears mentioned in his speech. Write about it in your journal.

