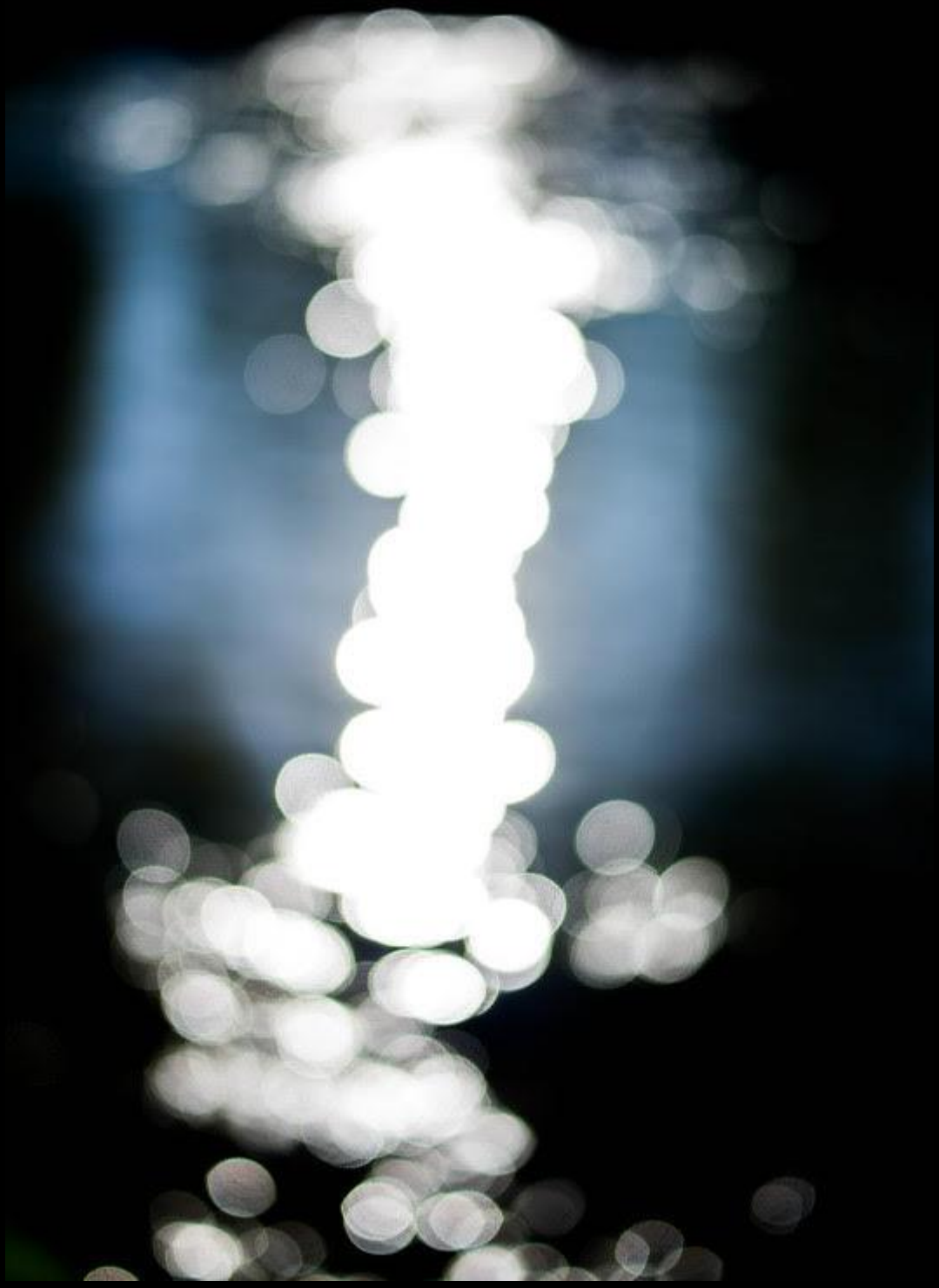

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Welcome dear Readers!

The correspondence between Yasuhiro and István, as well as Yasuhiro's poems that you find in this volume were born out of their collaborative reading of Mary Midgley's work. Midgley was a philosopher. She passed away recently and left behind an influential and sizeable body of public philosophy. Clare Mac Cumhaill (Durham University, UK) and Rachael Wiseman (Liverpool University, UK) started a project – the Notes from a Biscuit Tin – to honour and celebrate her work, and to develop it in a way Mary would have been happy to see: by staging 12 events across the globe, each one built around a conversation between a poet and a philosopher. Mary's famous biscuit tin, which she used to carry to conferences and debates, travels from place to place, and after each conversation the poets and the audience deposit poems, questions, and thoughts in it on slips of paper.

Clare visited Japan in 2019 and gave a talk at the Tokyo Forum for Analytic Philosophy at Tokyo University's Komaba campus. Her talk was followed by a vivid and exciting discussion, and a little later she invited philosophers John O'Dea and István to join the event and organize the Japanese leg of it. Since John couldn't take on the task due to his many duties, István took the event forward. With the help of friends and Japanese poets he met Yasuhiro, who was willing to join the project. This lucky turn of events meant that they could embark on reading some of Midgley's essays and books, and to reflect on the meaning of instinct, imagination, animal and human nature, and on the role of poetry and philosophy.

The volume contains letters and poems. Yasuhiro wrote the cycle poems published in this little volume while reading Midgley's poems in Munich. The letters preceding the poems were exchanged as preparation for a live event, which was planned to be held in Tokyo in April 2020, at the Good Heavens Café and Bar in Shimokitazawa. Sadly, the virus intervened and the event had to be postponed. Eventually Yasuhiro and István made up their mind to host the event online in December 2020, with a live follow-up planned for next summer.

2019 November 1st

Dear Yasuhiro,

I hope you have been well. How is the autumn in Germany? Are your preparations for your move to Japan on track?

I'm writing to you from Hamamatsu. My wife works in the Mikatahara part of the city. Mikatahara's name is connected to the historical Mikatagahara, a battlefield – and now graveyard – where Ieyasu suffered one of his worst defeats, in 1537. It is a traditional part of town: farmlands, old fashioned sweets shops, some modern family homes and a couple of small businesses and konbinis make up the neighbourhood. A very quiet area, ideal for sitting back to think while watching the potatoes grow.

The air is now fresh and the colours of the houses look more vivid than in the strong sunshine of the summer, or the grey of the rainy season. 文化の日 is coming in a few days, so I will keep on reading and thinking about our project.

It is hard to decide where to start. The book seems to pursue an understanding of human nature: is there such a thing, and if there is, what is it like? And how should we even find out about this? When I started reading, I became very happy: one of my first academic readings was Konrad Lorenz's study about the communication of birds. I was still in high school and I had an older girlfriend who was already a university student. She was writing an essay about this topic for one of her lectures, and recommended me Lorenz's book. So, I'm fond of ethology for many reasons. It is funny how our personal values can influence our scientific sympathies. Maybe that is why real objectivity is rare even in the hard sciences.

Another thing that I was glad to see was that Midgley avoids constructing a unified, reductive explanatory scheme. She does not try to fit all elements of human nature into a single mould. In fact, she stresses that different fields of investigation – psychology, ethology, neuroscience, literature, etc. – might not be reducible to each other, and it is possible that they cannot be connected. That doesn't diminish their objectivity. It also leaves in place the rules governing those fields – how to do proper psychology, biology, etc. It is a healthy methodological pluralism, which recognises that there are several explanatory

ventures, motivated by different interests. I'm trying to push a similar approach in my work on human agency.

The political and public dimensions of Midgley's project are also interesting, partly, because I think some of these questions are alive to this day. In the revised introduction for the 1995 edition, Midgley discusses how public debates moved on in the 1980s, after the publication of Wilson's *Sociobiology* and Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene.* When I lived in Oxford people working in the humanities and the social sciences always made fun of Dawkins. He was seen as doing exactly what he was preaching against, and was therefore perceived as intellectually dishonest.

Everyone recognised that he did much good when fighting oppressive ideas of old Christianity in developing countries – for example, he did a lot for educating people about AIDS and the importance of protection in poor African countries. In some of those places – e.g. in South Africa – Christian pastors rely on the old Catholic edicts and forbid their followers the use of protection, preaching that sex is only procreation. By this, they cause many deaths.

At the same time, in Europe Dawkins' tirades about the dangers of religion sound old fashioned and outdated, as well as oversimplified. Europe went through the enlightenment; we don't have the same fundamentalism that the US and some developing countries have and the division between state and church is stronger. It seemed that what Dawkins propagated was his own one-dimensional view of scientism: whatever science says and discovers will be good for society. A version of religion, adoring everything that natural scientists (and even engineers) say. For all these reasons I share Midgley's general sense, and feel why she thought that writing her book, and then preparing the subsequent editions, was a worthwhile effort.

Also, I think Midgley had an important effect politically, by convincing many conservative intellectuals and common sense people, that environmentalism is important. I like the way she ties this together with the topic of the book. The fight she was fighting is in part decided today: people in the humanities and social sciences gladly admit that humans are part of nature and a very unique type of animal with some special skills. Still, I wonder whether the general public feels this way. Maybe in the US many people still don't agree with this?

I have a Korean friend who believes – in line with her grandparents' traditional folklore – that evil animal spirits can affect a woman's pregnancy in a negative way. Our

Korean friend once told my wife, that she thinks her cousin's child was born mentally ill because her cousin saw a monkey during her pregnancy. The monkey cursed the baby. This is the kind of strange view of animals which many people had historically and which Midgley mentions when she discusses European discussions of 'savages' and older writings about the 'evil wolves' in Ch. 2. Perhaps heavily Christian and other conservative countries are especially prone to such ideas? Or it is related to shame-cultures? People have to be ashamed for deficiencies, even if they are not their fault? Hence, they look for made up reasons to deflect blame. Or maybe it is just a question of education?

The quotation from Plato's *The Republic* ch. 9 on p. 37 is particularly shocking: "(…) Reason is withdrawn. Then the Wild Beast in us, the control of full-fed with meat and drink, becomes rampant and shakes off sleep to go in quest of what will gratify its own instincts. As you know, it will cast off all shame and prudence at such moments and stick at nothing. In phantasy it will not shrink from intercourse with a mother or anyone else, man, god or brute, or from forbidden food or any deed of blood. It will go to any lengths of shamelessness and folly."

I knew that Midgley was very engaged with social issues and did political work, still, I felt surprised how good her judgment is. One of the points that she makes, which seems important to me, is that the current public debates are very one sided. They are strongly influenced by finance, economics, and popular science, based mainly on simplified and overgeneralised ideas from sociobiology and evolutionary biology. These views promote individualism, glorify competition and selfishness, advocate against communal organisation, and lack any substantive political message. They apply some ideas which were thought to work in genetics (but have been debunked) to *every topic*. At the same time, they provide no ideal to strive for. With the Sun having settled on Marxism and Socialism, there is nothing taking the place of an inspiring set of goals, like equality, empowerment, strong worker's rights. We are left in the hand of technocrats and reductivists. (See for example revised intro, p. 18 in the 1995 Routledge edition.) Ideals, a picture of the future that is pleasant for us humans as social beings, in which our societies can flourish, is lacking. Our societies need ideas about how to improve our current situation and where to go next. We need to conceptualise and form a picture of what is wrong now, and how we can move beyond it. These are necessary to enable social action.

Maybe this is one of the points where Midgley saw the role for the literary imagination and intuition. Philosophers can analyse and clear up things, but we usually do

not excel at providing visions which engage people emotionally and move them to action. At the moment the leading ideology is very individualistic. Think of the 'eat, pray, love' signs people put on their walls, as if that would be everything there is in life. The social, communal, artistic, work-related, creative, and political aspects disappear.

What do you think about the nature-nurture debate which comes up often? Do you see people's need for culture as something born with us? And do you think scientists can say something interesting about it? I think often neuroscientists get excited about 'explaining' something. Then what they do is this: they set up an experiment where they ask the subject to, for example, paint a small picture. While the person is painting, they monitor with an MRI/FMRI what is happening in their nervous system. That's then supposed to be an explanation of our ability to paint or of where our motivation to paint comes from.

My problem with this kind of experiment is that it doesn't add anything to what we already knew. Of course, for medical purposes it is nice to know which parts of the brain are active during what activities, because it can help devise medication – for hand movement coordination issues for example –, and understand better psychological problems – issues with lack of focus –, etc. But about creation, art, and human action in general, we don't learn much. We already knew that our body is active and working while we create. But this doesn't mean that culture, religion, social ties, intuition is not what informs the creation, what we create, how we do it, why we do it, and so on.

We are similar to animals in that our bodies are involved in our agency: whatever we do (think, imagine, move furniture, prepare holiday plans, have a family dinner) we are engaged in that as whole beings, not just as bodily or as mental. There is no separate mind and body, so that only one of these would be involved in an action at any point. Humans are wholes; our mental capacities are tied to our psychological-biological constitution. But we are also special animals: our biology and psychology are unique, and hence we have capacities no other beings have.

I found the story of Paul, who buys some land because he has a wish for privacy, a very good one for illustrating how economical (Marxist, capitalist), psychological (Freudian mainly), and sociological (social psychological) explanations can fall short of explaining a particular instance of normal grown up behavior. Midgley shows with this example that such behavior might be understood when humans are thought of as a member of the animal kingdom. The need for privacy is always there, and the more crowded our surroundings are,

the more strangers there are, the stronger this need can become. This resonates with me strongly now, living in Tokyo. A wish for privacy and behavior manifesting it can be called instinctual: we have an inborn tendency, disposition to pursue safety from strangers, and if the circumstances are apt and we have the power to do so, we act accordingly. This issue is also taken up on pp. 76-7, where Midgley discusses experimental results which indicate that social animals suffer from overcrowding, and not just because of lack of food and other resources, but psychologically and socially. The presence of others stimulates us, we engage with their being there, and this becomes exhausting. Culture can train us to accept more of this, but cannot extinguish the natural tendencies fully.

It is interesting to think of norms of politeness in Japan in this context: many of them, especially the ones pertaining to behavior on public transportation which is the most crowded public space, are there exactly to avoid having to engage others. That is, people don't stare at each other, don't talk, cover up their books, and pretend to sleep, in order to not to be noticed, and not to notice others. This way the stimulus to engage is minimal. I feel that crowded big cities always have such norms, no matter where they are – this is not a Japanese thing – and in such cities at the same time there are parts or places which are explicitly for socialising, like the bars in Japan where it is OK to chat with others and engage (of course not all bars and pubs, there are norms about this too).

It is interesting to think of communication and the need for creating things in this context. Humans are social and we do share roles, and distribute work in our communities, almost unconsciously. Kids practice this a lot: when they play, they often stop to make up rules or to clarify who is doing what, describe the extent of duties and possibilities that come with their roles. 'You can't do that!' 'Yes, I can! I'm allowed to do it because I'm the princess/king/hunter/ninja/catcher/…' they yell. To some extent taking on roles can be mimicry of adult behavior, but the motivation to mimic such behavior seems to be tendency born with us.

At the same time humans are very flexible. We live in enormously complex environments, act on a wide range of motivations, and can tolerate different political, legal, and cultural settings; live in heat or cold; in deserts and on seashores. Also, as Midgley remarks, what we learn from ethology is that humans live *less systematic and rule governed lives than animals*. (See Ch. 2, the *Tradition and Reality* section.) I think this might explain some of our more unique capacities and ideas, like inspiration and intuition. In a sense the book uncovers that humans are quite dangerous animals, with little inborn, instinctive inhibition against violence. I wonder how this aggression is connected to our abilities to

pursue creative cultural projects like science and art? If Midgley is right, and the 'beastly' aspects of our nature are actually the more rigid innate tendencies and dispositions (e.g. pp. 39-40), then these are the sources of structure and order in our life and thinking. So, maybe those aspects which are less natural are more tied to art and creation? Then again, as linguistics, or the study of literature shows, there is a lot of systematicity in art, both at the level of expression, and in its content.

Midgley writes the following: "The preoccupation of our early literature with bloodshed, guilt, and vengeance suggests to me that these problems occupied man from a very early time. I would add that only *a creature of this intermediate kind*, with *inhibitions that are weak but genuine* would ever have been likely to develop a morality. Conceptual thought formalizes and extends what instinct started." On pp. 52-3. In Ch. 3. she introduces the distinction between closed instincts, which specify a fixed behavior in detail – like the way birds build nests, – and open instincts, which specify some goals but leave the specific of achieving them underdetermined – like the way fish migrate over long distances to their spawning sites. She also mentions that some instincts are not active from the time of birth and only kick in later.

Then, if our creative abilities and our intellectual insight are connected to our instincts, they might be connected to open instincts which are relevant to behavior that we engage in when we're older. Maybe this is due to the roles we occupy and the activities we pursue – for example work, art, management, design – in society as we age, not at birth or when we're children (or rarely).

I apologise if my message is somewhat rambling. I'm still charting out my own ideas, as well as Midgley's. I hope there are some ideas or points where we maybe both have questions or want discuss. I'm looking forward to your message!

With best wishes,

Istvan

Letter 2 November 9, 2019 from Munich

Dear Istvan,

Thank you for your letter, which I found to be an excellent conversation starter. We should not be shy about rambling, talking about this and that as we go along, just like Frank O'Hara's *I do this I do that* poems. That is more suitable to discussing Midgley on avoiding the trap of a 'unified, reductive explanatory scheme' and hopefully stay within the 'healthy methodological pluralism'!

I am totally with you, Istvan, in appreciating Midgley's style of philosophy. Throughout this book, she attacks mercilessly the black and while sort of dualism in Descartes, and embraces the totality of her subject, ourselves, including its conflicts and contradictions: "the purpose of all *explanation* must be, ultimately, to illustrate the chaotic world with which we are actually surrounded" (p100) because "OUR NATURE IS WHOLE" (p180)" and "We have somehow to operate as a whole, to preserve the continuity of our being" (p187).

Mary Midgley is a philosopher of *whole* as opposed to *part*, of *continuity* as opposed to *contrast*, and of *integration* as opposed to *dogfight*. And that makes her a poet, as well. Because a poet uses the language not to dissect the chaotic world into a set of clean-cut pieces (that is the task of journalists) but, on the contrary, to fuse the apparently unrelated matters into something new. Octavio Paz once wrote "Poet gives name to things… this is a feather and that is a stone. And then he suddenly declares … the stone is the feather and this is that… heavy is light".[1] It also reminds me of the key concept of the philosophy of Toshihiko Izutsu 'absolute unsegmentation', but let's not get in there yet.

As for her argument in 'Beast Within', I guess the Asian culture has been relatively more easygoing about our 'Beast Within' than the Western counterparts. In Japan, there are many fables dealing with the interaction between men and animals. Fox and raccoon are typically depicted as a trickster like coyote in the native American mythology. 'Gratitude of a Crane',

[1] Octavio Paz. 2005. *El arco y la lira. El poema, la revelación poética, poesía e historia (Seccion de Lengua y Estudios Literarios).* Fondo de Cultura Económica.

still very popular today, tells of love and marriage between a crane and a man. The gap between men and animals had not been so wide until the country got westernized and industrialized. After all, according to the Buddhist teachings, you might have been an animal in your former life and can be one in the next life, depending on your sinfulness during this life. In the Wheel of Life, there are six possible outcomes of reincarnation, among which the Animal World is positioned third from the bottom.

But come to think of it, such interactions or interchangeabilities between men and animals can also be found in Europe. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are full of those tales, those of Centaur and Minotaur among them. Are they the embodiment of marriage between beast and man, or between instinct and rationality, a la Midgley? Vampires and Werewolves are the middle age's version whereas Cat Woman in the Batman series being one of the latest? For all the desperate efforts to kick the beast out of ourselves, we must have known all along that "the crude antithesis between feeling and reason, form and matter, is inadequate even to map the human scene—before we start trying to look for some continuity between man and other species" (p248).

To place ourselves in the continuity with all the other species and as a member of this planet certainly helps foster the environmentalism. Ovid vividly describes the Earth's lamentation after being scorched by the massive wildfires caused by Phaethon's rampage with his dad's heavenly chariot:

> "I can hardly open my lips to say these words (the heat was choking her). Look at my scorched hair and the ashes in my eyes, the ashes over my face! Is this the honour and reward you give me for my fruitfulness and service, for carrying wounds from the curved plough and the hoe, for being worked through the year, providing herbage and tender grazing for the flocks, produce for the human race and incense to minister you gods?"

2000 years later, we heard her again through Greta Thunberg.

Yesterday, I watched the movie version of *Capital in the 21 Century* based on Thomas Piketty's bestseller. It is clear that the current environmental crisis is caused by capitalism, which in turn was the product of the Western civilization, which, to borrow your words, today tends to "promote individualism, glorify competition and selfishness, advocate

against communal organization." I see these as the characteristics of rationality without feeling, the sad result of the obsessive pursuit of rationality by a lonely Man who has lost connection with Nature, or his Beast Within.

This leads us to the topic of 'Nature and Nurture', which to me is the central theme of Kafka's 'Investigations of a Dog'. Have you read this strange short tale? It is a story about a dog who ventures into scientific investigations to find out where food is coming from (Kafka's dogs never look up, and therefore, are not aware of the presence of human beings as their masters and feeders) but instead comes across a group of seven dogs who "conjure up music". He later has another experience of heavenly melody and decides to expand the scope of his investigations to include canine music:

"(Earlier) To penetrate the true nature of dogs, the study of nutrition seemed to promise the most direct route. Perhaps I was wrong to think so. The contiguity of the two sciences had already caught my attention. It's a lesson of the song that brings down nourishment."

Curiously, the story ends (rather abruptly) with the following reference to our subject matter, 'instinct':

"…the deeper ground for my scientific inability seems to be an instinct, and not a bad instinct at that… This was the instinct that –perhaps out of regard for science, but a different sort of science from that practiced today, an ultimate science—has led me to esteem freedom more highly than anything else. Freedom!"

So the dog now pursues both musical science and nutritional science (an interesting double major), though not in the conventional way but "a different sort of science…an ultimate science." I wonder if Kafka is referring to creative art and literature by this 'ultimate science' whereas the "sort of science (…) practiced today" could be the kind of science which Midgely detested. It is also interesting to note that, for the dog, the dominance of instinct over the conventional science is linked to the sense of freedom.

Both Midgley and Kafka (and his dog) try to reconcile, as opposed to tear apart, two distinct factors such as food and music, instinct and science, a dog and a man. Or, to use the phrase

of Octavio Paz once again, a feather and a stone. We can feel the free spirits in them, "a poet within", flying in the 'wholeness' away from the cage of rigid conceptualization.

Finally, let me come back to your point about "how this aggression is connected to our abilities to pursue creative cultural projects like science and art… those aspects which are less natural are more tied to art and creation?" In general, where do we humans differ from beasts in the spectrum of continuity?

My initial response, or *instinct* if you like, is somehow different from your proposition. I tend to contrast Art and Science in this case. Art, poetry in my case, is closer to instinct than to rationality. Poets, at least those I like, write against a rational or logical mindset which segments the whole into pieces in order to make differentiation and sense out of it. Segmentation, differentiation, and rearrangement of those pieces along the line of time and SVO word order, are the basic feature of the logical language, which is our everyday language as well as the language of law, science, and journalism. Poets, through the magical use of language, try to undo this segmentation and recreate the whole. And instinct, along with intuition, seems to play a secret role in that magic.

Gary Snyder, an American poet who was committed to an ecological way of living in the forest of California, described 'How Poetry Comes to Me' as follows,

> It comes blundering over the
> Boulders at night, it stays
> Frightened outside the
> Range of my campfire
> I go to meet it at the
> Edge of the light

The light of his campfire is our rational intelligence, or logos, but poetry lives in the darkness of instinct behind it. The Poet has to go meet it at the edge where logos/logic and instinct interacts with each other, creating poetic language.

Native Americans, whose oral verses had a great influence on Gary Snyder and his fellow poets such as Kenneth Rexroth and Jerome Rothenberg, have a song called 'The Magic Words'[2] that goes something like this:

> Once upon a time
> When men and animals were together on this world
> Men could become animals and animals could become men as they wished.
> And they all spoke the same language, the magic words.
> Men back then used to have a mysterious power.
> The words which slipped out of their mouths caused mysterious outcomes.
> Their words suddenly got lives of their own
> And what men wished in their mind came true.

This is quite similar to the poetics of Ki no Tsurayuki (紀貫之) expressed in the preface of the 12th century Japanese poetry anthology called 'Kokinshu':

Poetry has its seed in the heart of man and grows into tens of thousands of leaves of words. Many things happen in this world and the people must find words to express what they think in their minds as they see and hear things. Listen to the nightingale singing amid the blossom of spring and the voice of frog in the water, and you know that there is not a single creature on earth that does not sing its song. It is the power of poetry that moves the sky and the earth without using forces, draws sympathy from invisible demons and deities, warms up the relations between men and women, and even soothes the heart of warrior. Poetry is as old as the origin of this world.

It is quite obvious that our forefathers, whether in North America, Japan, or in Greece where Orpheus charmed even the stones with his music, used to see human being as a fellow creature of all the animals and plants, interacting with each other in one Nature.

[2] Jerome Rothenberg (ed.). 2014. *Shaking the Pumpkin*. *Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americans*. Station Hill Press of Barrytown. Quoted from the Japanese translation: 金関寿夫「魔法としての言葉 アメリカ・インディアンの口承詩」（思潮社）.

Having said that, I have no idea how instinct affects intuition and how our language differs from those of nightingales and frogs. I know that our intelligence is unique in that it simultaneously segments and integrates, and our language has both referencing and symbolizing functions. I am certain that Artificial Intelligence has only rationality / logic and is not capable of having consciousness, at least for the time being. On the other hand, I believe that animals have consciousness and feeling. The use of the sign language by chimpanzees which Midgley mentions in her book seems to be a logical and referential one (i.e. this sign = banana) without too much room for metaphor and metonymy, but how about the songs of whales? Are they singing or speaking? I cannot help but feel poetry when I listen to them, but maybe it's just me at the receiving end?

OK, quite enough for a letter, I guess. I look forward to gaining a new insight about poetry (what is poetry? Why am I obsessed with writing it?) through this discussion of Midgley with you.

Yasuhiro
November 9, 2019
Munich, Germany

Dear Yasuhiro,

It is a cloudy morning in Hamamatsu. From time to time a brilliant ray of the Sun shines through a crack in the clouds and the neighbour's otherwise drab, light-brown house takes on a more homely appearance. I always wonder how the lodgings looked in Oxford around the time when Midgley was a student, and in Newcastle, when she was a lecturer there later. I read your letter with much interest. And I was happy to realise that we agree on much and disagree on some things in a way that I could learn from. It can be truly surprising and helpful what and how we understand differently!

I was glad to read that much Buddhist teaching recognises the continuity between animals and humans. At the same I was wondering: why do the sinful become animals? Is it worse to be an animal than a human? Maybe it is. There is more chance, more danger, than in today's well-organised societies where food, heat, shelter and clothing are abundant. Was it always so? I'm not sure. I think it is also interesting what you wrote about the continuity as present in middle age tales about vampires and werewolves. They are usually evil creatures in middle-age lore, and even in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, despite their complexity. However, in the 20th century they have often been re-imagined as characters which can be good, neutral or evil, as in the fantasy and role-playing world of *Vampire: The Masquerade*. I particularly like in this context that you mention superheroes: humans who benefit and do good for society by acquiring animal traits. Spiderman also comes to mind. The reverse can be said about the villains, like Sabretooth in the *X-Men* comics, Batman's enemy *Killer Croc*, and Spiderman's opponents *Rhino* and *Vulture*. However, most of them are obviously humans, and their animal sides have to do more with their powers – their bodily capacities – rather than their personality and behavior. As such, these stories don't seem to condemn being animal-like in itself.

Regarding the origin of capitalism, I find it fascinating that both capitalism, socialism, and communism grew out of the same economic, religious and social changes in Europe. Now, the whole world's politics is mostly organised around these core-ideas and visions. China likes to claim that they developed organically along the lines of community oriented Eastern traditions like Confucianism and Taoism. I sadly don't know enough about China's history and these philosophical traditions to have a good quality opinion on this. Still, I am very

suspicious of their claim. It seems to me that they are using the Communist party-shell for political leadership, together with a market-based capitalist economy, and an authoritarian police-state model in the sphere of society. The first one seems to be a Russian development, the second a European project eventually most forcefully endorsed by the US, and the third just a general tool of modern autocracies. I think we are still lacking a genuine, positive alternative developed by the formerly Taoist and/or Buddhist, geographically East-Asian societies. To me, Japan's project of a genuinely multi-lateral, law-based (rather than military force driven) diplomacy and trade oriented international system is a more interesting development, and a more genuine alternative to former political and economic ideals developed in Europe in the age of nations. It is something fresh, like the EU.

I think there is some common ground for us on the question of art and science: we both seem to reject a notion of rationality which identifies it with economic utilitarianism; the kind of view which defines the good in terms of the greatest good, and defines the greatest good with the help of neoliberalism as a continuously growing economy. And we both reject scientism, the idea that we have to defer to the opinions of experts on natural science on every issue. Especially if the ideas of many natural scientists are ideological, and embody an outdated reductivism which cuts apart things which belong together.

The kind of role you envision for poets, of "undo(ing) this segmentation and recreate(ing) the whole" is very constructive. There are two notions of rationality that I'm interested in: one is psychological, and the other moral. The first one defines those actions as rational which contribute to the agent's goals, move his plans forward, and are coherent with their other projects. The second notion defines those actions rational which adhere to social norms that promote the good of society and the happy life in society. And I think neither of these standards of rationality can be met without thinking in terms of wholes: in terms of a healthy life with projects and mental wellbeing to enjoy them, and a life well lived in a supportive, accommodating society. But you are right that the kind of inspiration that you highlight by quoting the Snyder poem is markedly different from the often reflexive, conscious thinking going into reasoning and planning big decisions.

Recently I've been reading Midgley's *Science and Poetry*. It gave me a better idea of how she saw the role of poetry in society. I think in our previous exchange we expressed a sympathy for views which balance the interests of individuals and of communities which those individuals are members of. Midgley expressed this stance nicely in these lines "Any realistic notion of ourselves rests on the recognition that we ourselves – weak, ignorant and transient though we are – are certainly responsible beings, not bits of helpless dust floating

in the wind. Responsibility, however, is the condition of a social creature, not of a stone or a solipsist. It is always responsibility to and for those around us. This 'whole person' of whom we have been talking is not, then, a solitary, self-sufficient unit." (*Science and Poetry*, p. 14)

I've been wondering how her ideas about poetry connect with the conceptions of instinct and beastliness which she addressed in *Beast and Man*. I've watched a little while ago a short movie made by French couple Guillaume Néry and Julie Gautier. They are freedivers: diving to great depths for a long time without any equipment. In their short movie *One Breath around the World* they visit seven locations and take an underwater walk at each of them. The walks present a side of the world which most of us never experience. They evoke wonder, like magic or religious ideas. They do this through the experiences they give us. These experiences lead to forming a vision of our world which is more complex than the one we had before, incorporating striking underwater spaces.

These playful, musically accompanied walks made me daydream. I already knew that most mammals, humans included, can swim instinctively without learning, and also that human infants can swim underwater for short periods in the first 6 months after their birth. However, I also thought that humans have an instinctive fear of great depths and of being unable to breath. It turns out that our body has an innate reaction, called the 'mammalian diving reflex', which results in a drop in our heart rate, contracting veins in the limbs and expanding ones in vital organs, and body cooling. This way, some humans can stay underwater with one breath for 10-11 minutes. This is an example of the amazing flexibility of animals, including humans. It also shows our close relation to other mammals, and the role of instincts in our survival.

As social mammals I think we are also by nature drawn towards cooperation and competition. The key idea is that, contrary to individualist thinking, cooperation – in its sensible, constructive forms – is only possible in a society, which can regulate and direct it so that it contributes to the common good. So, a strong cooperative foundation has to exist before individualist paths and competition can emerge without harm.

I think this is also well reflected in the tendencies of our imagination. Almost every person thinks that at some later point in their lives they will belong to a community. Maybe that community is their neighbourhood, their co-teachers and students, a circle of friends, or their family. Our natural tendency is to create narratives that take into account the actions and motivations of others, and revolve around what people want, how they coordinate their

intentions and plans, and what happens when they cannot agree on cooperating and get into conflicts. Such social, positive, and emotional (rational?) images draw us in.

Scientific explanations do not follow such narrative structures. They record a selection of facts and a number of observations. Sometimes this helps us to understand connections between occurrences, changes in the world. But that does not mean that this way of thinking is appropriate or helpful in every context. When we think about human affairs, it is much more informative to think in terms of emotions, ideas, desires and beliefs. The main directions and the potential functions of imagination are explained by these three factors together – our social mammalian nature, the importance of instincts tied to this nature, and our tendency to understand the world in terms of social narratives

These factors also highlight how imagination can be critical: it can help us to see where a certain idea leads. And by imagining that destination we can recognise if it is a bad destination. We can see, for example, how eliminating community-values from politics and replacing them with economic and business values leads to materially and emotionally impoverished lives for most. It leads us to growing economies and more wealth overall, but it does not lead us to happier, safer, less depressed communities where those in the worst positions have better chances. It is irrational from the point of view of society and the well-lived, goal-oriented life of individuals.

One of the things that I admire about Midgley's work is that she tries to clear away fictions and ideologies which take us in harmful directions, which constrain our imagination and lead it down narrow corridors leading to barren deserts. She has a kind of common-sense kindness and pragmatism. This quality of her work reminds me of Richard Rorty. There is an interview with Rorty, from 1997 on the Fulani Show, which I greatly admire. It is on *American Politics, the Left, and the New Left*. One of the things that I take Rorty to say is that reality is way too complex for any ideology to capture. In politics we need solidarity. We need to understand the particular problems which emerge. In his *Truth and Progress* (1998, p. 8) he writes that "Philosophy makes progress not by becoming more rigorous but by becoming more imaginative" and later on that "Nowadays, to say that we are clever animals is not to say something philosophical and pessimistic but something political and hopeful - namely, if we can work together, we can make ourselves into whatever we are clever and courageous enough to imagine ourselves becoming." (p. 175.)

Similarly, in his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* Rorty writes that "In my utopia, human solidarity would be seen not as a fact to be recognised by clearing away "prejudice" or burrowing down to previously hidden depths but, rather, as a goal to be achieved. It is to be

achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people. Such increased sensitivity makes it more difficult to marginalise people different from ourselves by thinking, "They do not feel as 'we' would," or "There must always be suffering, so why not let 'them' suffer?"”

Rorty focuses on how imagination, in partnership with solidarity, can lead to progress in politics. What is then imagination? And how can its literary instances help create visions which show the world in a light that enables positive action?

I think Mary's insights about the formative and crucial role of imagination are born out both by the political world, and by the history of philosophy. Regarding politics, the work of Mark Blyth is very revealing. Blyth gave a talk on 'Global Trumpism and the Future of the Global Economy' in which he shows that the current major discussions in newspapers, on news channels, and in politicians' speeches construct a fiction which masks the economic reality, and makes it impossible for most people to understand their own position and experiences correctly. It is a systematically misleading fiction, but a very effective one, because it captures peoples' imagination. In this sense, political speech and the news become very much like magic, as Toshihiko Izutsu discusses it in *Language and Magic*. They are not supernatural and not descriptive. They capture peoples' thoughts, move them emotionally, and as if an enchantment would have been cast on them, the truth becomes masked.

One of the most prominent components – or perhaps type – of imagination in philosophy is empathy; feeling with and for others. For example, Hume thought that empathy, natural sympathy as he calls it, is what enables morality. More recently Peter Goldie offered some insightful reflections on empathy. He distinguished two varieties of it: the first is a way of understanding others *as* others. This kind of deep understanding without actually putting ourselves into the others' position is ideal if someone else needs the sensible advice of an outsider, who is not affected by the same problems and emotions. Maybe because I don't experience her jealousy, I can give clear advice to my friend. Another variety of empathy is feeling *with* others. This is when we so strongly empathise with someone that we experience the same emotions. For example, when my wife was nervous about her big upcoming qualifying medical exams, I sometimes felt very nervous too, sharing in her anxiety. Both of these require imagination, the ability to see things from the perspective from others, understand their happiness, suffering, values and worries.

I think poetry can combine both of these positions, and make use of other types of imaginative capacities too. Going beyond Rorty, it can contribute to virtually any purpose: emotional, social, visionary, scientific, personal. At least that is my hope. I hope to explore Midgley's vision of the relation of poetry and science, and also to hear about your view and ideas.
Looking forward to your message.

With very best wishes,

Istvan

Dear Istvan,

Thank you for your letter, which I received while I was in Japan and on my way from Yokohama to Fukuoka to see my father. Thanks to the free WiFi, I could open the link you attached to the letter and watch the movie *One Breath around the World* on the Shinkansen.

What an amazing movie! Just about a year ago, I watched a documentary film called *Free Solo*, which was about a young man obsessed with rock climbing on the huge cliffs without any rope. I was quite fascinated by his adventure and thought that it could be a metaphor for a poet… pursuing the peak of his awareness and exaltation totally alone. It reminded me of Arthur Rimbaud's *Chanson de la Plus Haute Tour*:

> Ah! Let the time come when hearts are enamoured … let be, and let no one see you: do without the promise of higher joys. Let nothing delay you, majestic retirement.

But now I have realized Free Diving is even closer to my image of poetic endeavors. It should have gone down, not up. At least, that's what I try to do when I write a poem: to go down as deep as possible into the sea of consciousness. Perhaps up there over the mountains, hovers a heavenly inspiration. On the sea level, waves of clear logic and rationality. But deep down, is a dark and quiet territory filled with instinct, intuition, imagination and emotion. A poet holds his breath and free dives towards the abyss without any tank or weight, looking for the fish of words he has never seen before….

After spending the new year holiday in Japan, my wife and I flew to Beijing to get on board the Trans-Siberia train all the way to Moscow. We were not even aware of the Corona virus outbreak and the city of Beijing was business as usual, the forbidden city and Tiananmen Square full of visitors from all over the country. Had we been there one week later, we might have been trapped in the lock-down.

But the train trip was peaceful, cozy, and long, providing me enough time to finish reading Midgley's *Sicence and Poetry*. From time to time, though, I had to put down the book because the views from the window were just so breathtaking. Especially the snow-covered steppe of Mongolia! Outside it was around minus 20 degrees and there was no sign of humans but we saw quite a few animals. Cows with long black hair, horses with stout bodies,

sheep and deer. They were herding together, species by species, either hanging loosely around or making a circle like dancers. How social and cooperative! I smiled to myself, remembering Midgely's description of wolves and her denunciation of social atomism and solipsism.

But look! Here and there, there were loners. A deer or a horse, standing alone away from their packs. Not doing anything, but just being there… in this vast wilderness. They were *Solo* for sure. Were they *Free* as well? I couldn't tell, but their solitary figures brought back in my mind both films, *One Breath* and *Free Solo*. Clearly some of the beauty of those films comes from the fact that they are about ultimate one-man missions.

Last November, I was in Hong Kong taking part in a poetry festival. The theme of the festival, selected by a renowned poet Bei Dao, was *Speech and Silence*. In his opening speech, Bei Dao quoted Wittgenstein's famous phrase "What can be said at all can be said clearly: and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent" and suggested that poetry somehow speaks through that silence. "Poetry starts where philosophy ends" to use the phrase of Paul Celan. He had asked each participating poet to respond to his essay by writing their own and discuss it throughout the one-week festival. There were about 30 of us from all over the world despite the ongoing chaos and violence in the city… or possibly because of that.

I am not sure of Bei Dao's intention for selecting this topic when he shared it with us back in August. But by the time we were actually in Hong Kong, *Speech and Silence* had become a specific, and rather challenging, question to us: in the face of this oppression by the authority and the suffering of the people, should a poet remain silent? If not, what sort of speech is possible?

Not surprisingly, most of the poets were the defenders of silence against speech. They cautioned against propaganda-like speech even if its political cause is a justifiable one. For example, Forrest Gander, who had recently won the Pulitzer prize, wrote:

In a time when we are all bombarded constantly by advertising and spectacle, by ideological rants and evangelists, silence can be an almost miraculous wormhole through

all the noise into stillness, which is another kind of silence, the silence in which we encounter ourselves.

Never before in human history has language been considered to be almost exclusively instrumental, rational, and transactional. But throughout every record of previous cultures, other forms of language were considered necessary for the full expression of human experience. Poets, shaman, hechiceros, griots, and lovers use language in ways that are not necessarily logical in order to heal, to induce or share revelation and vision, and to enact or create psychological and emotional states.

Mathura, a Lithuanian poet, echoed Forrest by saying:

It is a gift to have a mirror that allows us to reflect what we are and what we have become. A voice that is quiet, but enduring, can remind us of what outlasts all the noise and slogans around us. These include the voices of the children, the voices of the poor, the voices of the prayers. The voices of poets, voices guided by insight and care and a will to protect that which is precious.

The quiet, gentle, unrelenting voice of poetry can still remind us that even silence has a lot to say, that silence matters. And we still need to listen carefully to what it has to say, so as to have a chance to hear the finer, tendermost impulses within us. Then it might occur that these are the impulses that really define us, and help us survive – so as to send out the signal, wipe out the noise.

Miłosz Biedrzycki, aka MLB, from Krakow, Poland places more emphasis on the urgency for speech after elaborating on the importance of silence in the context of Buddhism idea of śūnyatā and Quantum Vacuum in quantum physics. He concludes that, because poetry is made of language, and the language is, as Midgely repeatedly argued, essentially for the purpose of connecting one individual to another, poetry is always and necessarily 'political':

Just as the objects of quantum physics manifest their very existence by means of interactions with one another, thoughts, ideas and courses of action proceed from potentiality into existence – from silence into sound – when transferred and shared between individuals by means of language. Whatever has been spoken, had to be spoken for the first time at some point. Therefore, to speak about what we cannot – yet – speak about is not only possible, it is also, I believe, our duty as poets.

Wittgenstein famously wrote in the Preface to his Tractatus (as translated by David Pears and Brian McGuinness): "What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence". After a certain amount of deliberation, I adopted as my personal and artistic motto a paraphrase of those words:

"What can be said at all can be said clearly. About the rest, we must strive to write poems."

I was moved by the fact that, despite a delicate difference in nuances and style, they all agree in that: poets speak through silence in a language of instinct, intuition, imagination and emotion. I should also add 'empathy' here because this particular type of language is tasked to capture the whole as it is, in contrast to the logical language, i.e. the language of rationality as spoken by lawyers, scientists, journalists, and politicians serves to dissect the whole into pieces. The language of poets is circular, connecting past to future, life to death, and 'I' to 'you', whereas the logical language is linear along the time line and logical sequences.

This brings me back to the free-diver deep in the sea and the lone deer on the Mongolian steppe. Silence requires distance and solitude. Only through solitude, can the free diver reach the *One Beach around the World*. The lone deer, while physically being apart from his fellow deer, was in fact corresponding with the entire universe.

Well, I guess I am being indulged with too much 'Speech' for a poet. Let me now have my poems speak 'Silence' instead:

Philosophy and Poetry
-- To Mary Midgley

"Poetry starts
where philosophy ends"
said a poet who survived Auschwitz.

It could be so,
but there is also poetry that stops in front of philosophy
or philosophy that imagines the world after poetry disappears.

Philosophy of someone who loved the biscuit in a tin
spends the long afternoon with poetry.
A living human being, not abstract idea, serving tea for them.

Outside the window, as the birds fly up, the boundary
between the tree's twigs and the depth of the sky melting into each other.

When the sun is down, poetry
goes back to its house at the bottom of the well of words,
and listens to the voices of the dead.

Philosophy puts her biscuit tin away,
turns to face us, and starts talking
about the wisdom for living.

Munich, February 28, 2020

Yasuhiro Yotsumoto

Poems on the Bank of Mary Midgley

Family Constellation

I don't have to go anywhere
because I have the infinite Nature inside me.
All I need is this little one,
smiles the retired transportation officer, 88, in front of his Bonsai tree.
His one room apartment on the Tokyo bay reminds one of a nuclear shelter.

Granddaughter, an exchange student in California, feels somewhat let down
as she learns that menstruation in English is just 'period'.
Feels like being taken away from the moon.
Sequoia trees are too large for selfies.
Standing next to her in the same image is a boy from Nigeria.

Was Radio responding to his name, Radio,
or just to the voices calling him?
Mother doesn't think it matters any more.
When the son found the puppy, the fur on his hind was gone because of the skin disease.
The husband, who named him Radio, is still wondering between a tree funeral and an ocean funeral.

Grandmother (and the wife) gets bewildered as the sun goes down.
They say she comes to the entrance hall and sits down on the floor at 5 o'clock.
She can still sing folksongs even though she can't recognize her husband.
A long journey from a phenomenon to an existence,
following the path of Princess Kaguya.

The consciousness of the scattering family members
is bound together and rocked gently by the sea in their cells.
The waves erase the borderline between the human and the plants, insects and animals.
Their family tree, said to date back to the Muromachi era, is now rendered to a childish circle,
still breathing softly.

Note:
Princess Kaguya (Shining Princess) is the protagonist in *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* (竹取物語), the oldest extant Japanese prose narrative from the 10th century. Sent from the moon, she is discovered as a baby inside the stalk of a glowing bamboo plant, grows up to be a beautiful lady, and is eventually taken back by the heavenly entourage to their palace on the moon.

Muromachi era lasted from 1336 to 1573

星の家族

自分のなかに無限の自然があるから
もうどこにも行かなくていい
これ一本あれば充分
盆栽を前に今年喜寿を迎える元運輸技官が笑う
湾岸のワンルームマンションはどこか核シェルターめいている

孫の少女は留学先のカリフォルニアで
生理が英語ではただの period だと知って拍子抜けする
月と自分が離れ離れになったみたい

セコイアは大きすぎてセルフィーに収まらない
一緒に写っているのはナイジェリアから来たという男の子

ラジオはラジオという名前に反応していたのか
ラジオと呼ぶ人の声に反応していたのか
母はもうどっちだっていいと思う
息子が拾って来た時は皮膚病で尻の毛が抜け落ちていた
名付けた夫は樹木葬か海洋葬か迷っている

祖母（にして妻）は日暮れに怯えるようになった
五時になると施設の玄関まで来てぺたんと座りこんでしまう
夫の顔は忘れてもわらべ歌ならまだ歌える
現象から存在への遥かな道のり
かぐや姫の後を追って

ばらばらに散らばる家族の意識を
細胞のなかの海が互いに結びつけて揺らしている
波はヒトと草木虫魚との境目を消してゆく
室町あたりから伝わるという家系図には子供じみた丸がひとつ
今もひっそり息づいている

Intuition and Instinct

I thought it was about *Intuition*.
Only realized my mistake after I had accepted the offer.
Intuition and Instincts are confusing (especially in English).
That was before last summer.

Since then a Pennine Walk,
an endless row of Siberian birches in the train window,
several books of Mary Midgely and that dream
of me chatting with a dog, and still I don't quite get it

how the two differ from each other.
Which was it that made me say yes to Istvan's proposal
without hesitation: Intuition or Instinct?
It was certainly *not* Rationality.

Which was it that came
blundering over the boulders at night
to the edge of the light of Gary Snyder's campfire?
That thing Snyder called Poetry……

During the summer, it was always on the root of that tree
on the bank of Isar River that I read Midgely.
Water flowing at the edge of my vision all the time.
'Water' and 'Flowing' getting into each other,

bugs landing on the page of her book,
and the tips of their antenna wandering around the printed letters,
something was thinking *me*, in that brightness where
the shadows of Intuition and Instincts overlapped.

直感と本能

てっきり直感についてだと思ってた
引き受けてしばらくしてから気づいたんだ
intuition と instinct は紛らわしい（特に英語だと）
去年の夏の前の話だ

それからペナイン・ウォークと
窓の外に果てしなく続くシベリアの白樺林と
数冊のメアリー・ミジレーと、犬と親しく言葉を交わした
夢の後でも僕にはまだ分かっていない

その二つがどう違うのか
イストヴァンからの誘いに二つ返事で僕が乗ったのは
intuition だったのか instinct だったのか？
少なくとも合理ではなかったはずだ

ゲリー・スナイダーの焚き火の
光の輪の一番端まで　夜の岩を越えて
おどおどと近づいて来たのはどっちだったのか？
彼はそれを詩と呼んだけれど

夏のあいだ僕がミジレーを読む場所は
イザール川の畔のあの木の根っこの上と決まっていた
視界の端にいつも水が流れていた
「水」と「流れる」が互いのなかへ入りこんで

ページの上に羽虫が舞い降りてきた
触覚の先が活字をさまよい
何かが僕を思考していた　直感と本能の
二つの影の交わった明るさのなかで

St. Luke's Cow

Ears wet
with the cow's breath.

Its long tongue
talking about the world,
this world where cows eat grasses in silence
and men are busy naming things.

His hands swiftly jot down every one of those words
though hardly understanding a thing.

Where do these words come from?
It is also words
that ask such a question.

Stars just twinkle without words.

Moment by moment, hearts flow out of the body,
breaking away from the gravity of meaning,
tempted by the wordless songs of all the living creatures.

In a tiny space
between the cow's tongue and the man's ear,
hides the 'Un-name-able', laughing
soundlessly.

聖ルカの牛

牛の息で
耳が濡れている

長い舌は
世界について語っている
牛が寡黙に草を食み
人が名付けるのに忙しいこの世界について

手はその一語一句を素早く書き写す
何ひとつ分からぬままに

言葉は
どこからやって来るのだろう？
と問いかけるのも言葉

星はただ瞬くだけ

心は刻々躰から溢れてゆく
意味の重力に抗って
生きとし生けるものの無言歌に誘われて

牛の舌と人の耳の
僅かな隙間に
〈名付けられない〉が隠れている
声をたてずに笑っている

Inuo the dog-man, and I

Inuo the dog-man has dark skin,
his nose in a peculiar shape of roundness.
You can smell sweet-sour odor around the nape of his neck.

I don't know which
of his parents is a dog and which a human.
Sometimes he looks to me more
dog than a pure dog.

Inuo the dog-man is reading Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft,*
lamenting even Snoopy was not entirely free from the duality
of mind and body, of subjectivity and objectivity.

Humans sometimes project a dog's image to God,
other times see their true selves in a dog,
but to me Inuo is nothing but Inuo.

When Inuo laughs,
it is as though the particles of the air around him
get tickled and start to quiver.

I am scared of the concept of 'purity', says Inuo,
Isn't the essence of love 'being mixed'?

Miao,
reply I.

犬男とわたし

犬男の肌は浅黒い
鼻の先が独特の丸みを帯びている
首筋のあたりから甘酸っぱい匂いがする

お父さんとお母さんの
どちらが犬でどちらが人間だったのか分からない
ときどき純正の犬よりも犬男の方が
犬っぽく見える

犬男が『純粋理性批判』を読んでいる
スヌーピーですら、精神と肉体、主観と客観の二元論から
逃れられなかったと嘆きながら

人間は時に神に犬の姿をまとわせ
時に犬のなかに自らの素顔を見出したりするが
わたしにとって犬男は犬男だ

犬男が笑うと
見えない尻尾に撫られて
空気の分子まで震えだすみたい

「純粋」って恐ろしい、と犬男は言う
混ざり合うことこそ愛の本質ではなかったか？

ミヤーオ、
とわたしは答える

Rose and Banana

Hanako the Chimpanzee
is pointing with her finger
at a card with the picture of a banana.

Which is closer at that moment,
the real banana or the pictured banana,
to whatever is being projected on her consciousness?
Or could it be a totally different thing,
like the smiling face of the researcher clapping his hands?

When Rilke the poet
wrote "a rose
is all the roses in the world,"

he was at the farthest place from any rose
even if it happened to be in his Muzot's rose garden.

Although the 'evolution' from a chimpanzee to a human
took hundreds of millions of years,
the banana in a picture and the banana in a poem
still make up the two sides of our languages.

It was when the hairy index finger of Hanako pointing to the reality
held Rilke's pen and dipped it in the ink of metaphor and symbol,
that we descended from the top of trees
and ate bananas.

バラとバナナ

チンバンジーの花子が
バナナの絵の描かれたカードを
指差している

そのとき花子の意識に浮かんでいるのは
本物のバナナと絵のバナナの
どちらに近いのか？
それともバナナとは全くの別物なのか、
たとえば手を叩いて喜ぶ博士の笑顔だったり？

詩人のリルケが
「一輪のバラはすべてのバラ」
と書いたとき

彼はどんなバラからも遠いところにいた
たとえそこがミュゼのバラ園の只中であったとしても

チンパンジーから人類までの「進化」には
数億年の歳月を要したが
「絵に描かれたバナナ」と「詩のなかのバラ」は
私たちの言語の表裏を成している

現実を差し示す花子の毛深い人差し指が
比喩と象徴のインクに浸されたリルケのペンを握ったとき
私たちは樹上から降りてきて
バラを食べたのだ

On Social Atomism

-- reading *Science and Poetry* on the Trans-Siberian train

On the Mongolian Steppe flimsily covered with snow,
animals herded together.
Cows with cows, sheep that looked like alpaca
with sheep that looked like alpaca.

Slim legged deer (I guess that's what they were)
making a circle like ballet dancers,
or running swiftly up the hill in a pair of two
but once in a while, a lone one,
standing still in the morning sunlight.

Does he not like to stay with his fellow deer,
or is he a poor outcast?
Or is he attempting to get connected, in his solitude,
to all the living creatures regardless of species
through the intercourse with the sun, the earth, and the light?

If you stand alone in a particular point,
you can keep the equal distance to the society and to the cosmos,
isn't that true?

社会的原子論について

——シベリア鉄道の中でミジレーを読みながら

薄い雪に覆われたモンゴルの平原で
獣が群れをなしていた
牛は牛とともに　アルパカのような綿羊は
アルパカのような綿羊とともに

ほっそりとした脚の鹿（の一種だと思う）たちは
円陣を組んで佇んだり
二匹一組になって仲良く丘を駆け登ったり
だが時折一匹だけ
ぽつんと朝陽を浴びている奴もいた

群がるのが嫌なのか
仲間外れか
それとも種の違いを超えて生きとし生きるすべてと
繋がろうとしているのか　孤独の中で
空と地と光と交わることで

ある特異な地点に一人で立てば
社会と宇宙とに等距離を保つことができる
かどうか？

Philosophy and Poetry

-- To Mary Midgley

"Poetry starts
where philosophy ends"
said a poet who survived Auschwitz.

It certainly could be so,
but there also might be poetry that stops in front of philosophy
or philosophy that imagines the world after poetry disappears.

Philosophy of someone who loved the biscuit in a tin
spends the whole afternoon with poetry.
A living human being, not abstract idea, serving tea for them.

Outside the window, as the birds fly up, the boundary
between the tree's twigs and the depth of the sky melt into each other.

When the sun is down, poetry
goes back to his house at the bottom of the well of words,
and listens to the voices of the dead.

Philosophy puts her biscuit tin away,
turns to face us, and starts talking
about the wisdom of life.

哲学と詩　　——Mary Midgley に

「哲学が終わったところから
　詩は始まる」
と言ったのはアウシュビッツを生き延びた詩人

たしかにそういうこともあるだろう
だが哲学の手前で立ち止まっている詩もあれば
詩の絶えた後の世界を想像する哲学だってあるかもしれない

缶入りビスケットを愛したひとの哲学は
詩とともに午後を過ごす
観念よりもひとりの生きた人間にお茶を淹れてもらって

窓の外では、鳥が飛び立つたびに
木の梢と空の深みの境目が溶けて混ざり合う

日が暮れると
詩は帰ってゆく　言葉の井戸の底で
死者たちの声を聴くために

哲学はビスケットの缶を仕舞って
私たちの方に向き直り
生きるための知恵について語り始める

2020 November 2nd, a late letter to Yasuhiro, after reflecting on the COVID epidemic and the fall of Hong Kong as we knew it

According to Midgley philosophy and poetry do not simply provide beauty and wisdom as luxuries; they fulfil real needs: philosophy the need for clear ideas which can direct our public discussions and social thinking, and poetry the need to see what good changes are possible, motivating them by capturing their imagination. Philosophy can this way have an effect on politics, morality, and economics; and poetry, and also perhaps some of the other arts, can move people and swing them into action. This does not mean that they are enough to effect positive social change in themselves. But they *can* contribute to it, they *can* help.

To do so poets and philosophers don't need to come up with wholly new ideas from nothing. Midgley isn't saying that we have to understand politics, economics, finance, sociology, cultures, and so on fully. We can rely on others, the people who do good work already. There are hundreds of departments where dedicated and clever people are investigating the important topics and publishing their results. We can rely on their detailed analyses and ideas; we don't have to do this on our own. Real life provides the material: the diagnosis of problems and challenges, the proposals for solutions and ideas on how to move forward. Some of the things we can do well are to put these things into a form that will help reach more people and affects heart and mind, not as two distinct faculties, but as Midgley says as one complex feature of us humans.

Poetry and art excel at evoking empathy and helping us to understand that lives that we could not imagine and haven't experienced are possible. I often think back to Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child*. That book opened my eyes to the nature of the feelings of parents for children. Without preaching or putting its main messages into words explicitly, the book manages to convey that most parents feel unbreakable bonds to their children, even if those children are burdensome,

challenging, ruining the family idyll, and their actions are upsetting. This is something that a philosophical argument or a sociological study can also describe or argue for, but it is a different thing to enable the reader to experience the force of emotions, attachment, the pains and disappointments, the futility of rational deliberation, and other states that make the reality of decision making and family life emotionally intense, sometimes elevating, sometimes exasperating.

Art brings to life clashes of values, dilemmas, emotions and ideas which surprise us, and also renders thought easier to follow. Of course, in philosophy we can reconstruct the steps of how an agent gets from being motivated to achieve something, to a decision to act, and then starts pursuing her goal. However, we focus on the structure of such a process and its ever-present, most general structure, which makes reasoning in one case similar to reasoning in countless other cases. This approach only emphasizes the differences between using one's ability to reason, and not using it; or the difference between reasoning and then acting on one's judgment, and reasoning but then acting against one's judgment. But it does not help us to grasp what is different in deliberating about whether to buy some grapes, or strawberries, both, or neither; and between deliberating about whether to give up one's child with mental disabilities to a care home, putting their wellbeing to risk, but keeping life enjoyable for the rest of the family, or to keep them at home but risk ruining the lives of everyone else staying there. Even if some of the important distinctions will be captured in such philosophical work, what most philosophers focus on are the general differences between the *kinds* of content that, say, an intention and a belief, or a desire and a belief have, and neglect the difference between their particular contents. Desires for example seem to always be directed at future states of affairs we want to bring about, while beliefs are propositions about the way things are, and this is important philosophically. But whether a belief is about strawberries or gooseberries is not significant. The philosophical discussion can help us to get a better grasp on what exactly is happening in these cases, on what makes some of these decisions so hard to make for beings with our psychology, and in this way gives us

understanding of a kind, but not the understanding that is required to heighten our empathy, and to enable us to see that behind puzzling or questionable actions of others struggles lie that we can sympathize with and respect, rendering their actions understandable, and enabling us to give them the right kind of support. The philosophical understanding of actions and agency provides a different kind of understanding, one which helps us to see clearer how and when specific kinds of moral judgments are apt to make, how moral psychology connects with epistemology and so on.

Briefly put, poetry can help us to grasp how values of agents shape their thinking, and how one would feel if one were living the life of others. Philosophy does not aim at doing this. Would that be liveable, bearable, unhappy or happy existence? Things become imaginable thanks to poetry and art. Philosophy will clarify for us the concepts and ideas we can use to think about some generic phenomena, it will enable us to make clear arguments about common issues, and distil ideas that help us to think about acting, thinking, and deciding in general. In Midgley's words, philosophy helps to see how the underlying structure of our public thinking – political debates, conversations between voters, discussions about serious issues at home, among friend - about difficult issues works, and what parts of our moral psychology it relies on to work well.

Both kinds of understanding are important. One for understanding others and being empathetic, one for being able to discuss things and have a healthy public conversation about complex topics like taxes, government forms and social customs. And the two are of course interconnected and strengthen each other too: discussing politics, sex, love and work goes better if it is fuelled by understanding of real-life issues and examples, and we can turn our empathy into support through practice easier if we have a good grasp on of how difficulties like poverty, addiction, or personal tragedies and pains come about.

Imagination can then heal and educate us. This does not mean however that in itself it is something good. Imagination needs direction. It can aid us in putting next to each other values which we would not have thought compatible before, and it can inspire us to be better and kinder – just think of the elevated feelings one experiences while watching the family scenes of Greta Gerwig's version of *Little Women* or Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*. But think also of how imagination has been misused by people who gave it the wrong direction; from evoking conspiracy theories, through inciting hate to fortifying bigotry and exploitation, the power of imagination's grasp on our hearts is great. It does this through instilling fear, hatred, anger and unjustified pride, as well as in other ways, exemplified by the activities of Goebbels, or more recently of Cambridge Analytica and of Steve Bannon. There were also artists who have used their imagination and talent to convey evil messages in appealing, impressive forms. Just think for example of Ezra Pound's technically splendid poem *Sestina: Altaforte*, in which Pound writes

Papiols, Papiols, to the music!
There's no sound like to swords swords opposing,
No cry like the battle's rejoicing
When our elbows and swords drip the crimson
And our charges 'gainst "The Leopard's" rush clash.
May God damn for ever all who cry "Peace!"

We have also witnessed since the breakout of the COVID epidemic that politicians and businesses first try to increase their power and profits, and only then consider what is good for citizens. There are many questions, which are too easy to answer: is the Chinese Communist party and their current ruling elite deeply guilty in the current situation? Clearly, it is. Has Donald Trump contributed through his lies and incompetency to the severity of the situation? He did, without a single doubt. Have people like Bolsanaro and Johnson made the situation worse? Yes. These are horrifying facts, and questions that are easy to settle.

At the same time, the loud parading of politicians as all important defenders of their countries, and the enormous advertisement campaigns of streaming services, home delivery options, and other related business ventures is drowning out sensible discussion of how to move on. How to live during the pandemic? And what to do afterwards? A number of journalists, economists, and thinkers have put forward sensible proposals. But these are usually – and one suspects: somewhat maliciously – quickly swept aside by the current of propaganda and marketing. Imagination, and patient clear thinking are sorely needed. There is a real need for them. There is work to be done for all us to figure out how to live.

How to get started on this work? There are tools lying around. We have robust ethical views. We have wonderful poetry. We have as a resource to draw on decades of important work on slow life, sustainability and local community-based food production. We have emerging smart ideas to facilitate better redistribution of property and income, and to spur economic growth and increase the quality of life for everyone. One just has to look at the ideas of the recently deceased David Graeber: there are wonderful suggestions on how to organize solidarity and cooperation among people who are sliding into more and more vulnerable positions due to the restructuring of the job markets, on how to help people working in the service industry to organize their own defence and step up for their interests. There is very good analysis by Guy Standing and his colleagues on how a new precariat is forming, and how the people pushing the development of AI and deregulation of the labour market do not care at all about how entire professions are eliminated and people are discarded like old machines. We can read in the recent book of Thomas Piketty – supported by 1,000 pages of evidence, some supplied by the IMF, the OECD, and the UN – about the rapid rise of inequality of incomes, of property ownership, and of ownership of means of production. There are also suggestions on what to do to change these trends and take back political power and provide better lives to most. The money and the means are there. But they are owned by an ever-shrinking circle of people.

Since the ideas on how to improve the situation are already there, poets and philosophers have their work cut out: to fire up the imagination of people and move them into action, and show with arguments that it is reasonable to act to change society, and that it can be done. This cannot be done by philosophers alone, at least not very well. An interesting case in which moral and ethical considerations are of supreme importance in order to avoid horrible outcomes for humanity is the regulation of AI development and deployment. I've read a good deal of the philosophical literature on the ethics of AI, and what I came to realize was this: science fiction has anticipated correctly most of the large ethical problems that we will soon face. People like William Gibson, Philip K. Dick, Ursula K. Le Guin, and more recently Marshall Brain, Hannu Rajaniemi and Nora K. Jemsin, have explored many of the possibilities that developments in AI and robotic technology can lead to. Their works do not just describe the theoretical possibilities, but build these into stories, and as such touch and move us through the fate of their characters' lives. This way, they don't simply tell us what is true or will likely be true about certain matters; rather, they help us to assess and imagine what it would be like if certain things were to happen. What philosophers working in the field of ethics of AI can then do is to see based on current evidence which risks and benefits are most likely to occur, and to think through carefully how those possibilities should be regulated; is there a moral duty to facilitate them – as in the case of certain healthcare technologies there might be – or a moral duty to prevent them – as in the case of certain military technologies there certainly is.

In a sense what is needed is to give people faith in a new moral, social and political system that can work. I myself am not religious, but I have always admired the devotion – if not the resulting behavior – of people who understand all the rational doubt, the lack of credible evidence, and nevertheless make the leap and become knights of faith. We certainly do not need to instil religion in people, but we do need to motivate them. Imagine the ancient Christians during

the first century, the Roman Empire still in full force and Christianity illegal. My university town in Hungary, Pécs (or Sopiane in the Roman times) gave home to secret Christian sects. They held their gatherings in secret places, underground temples, and buried their dead in hidden locations. Today some of these graves can be seen in the Cella Septichora. What motivated these people to believe even though they had to hide and faced punishments for their faith? What gave resolve to stay firm in their beliefs to Christians like Abelard and Origen, who have undergone horrible experiences during their lives? We need to move people in a similar way to how Christianity has moved these people, we need to make them dream and believe that dreams can be realized. We need certainty, that the changes we envision can come true. We need this for our survival, we need this for humanity. Midgley writes in her *Utopia, Dolphins and Computers* (p. 13):

In the West, for instance, the future seemed utterly hopeless to many people during the break-up of the Roman Empire and again during the Thirty Years War. In many ways, too, things looked very black during the early years of the Industrial Revolution. The reformers who then set about the discouraging business of abolishing the slave trade, or attacking the state of factories in the 1840s, or rewriting political theory after the failed revolutions of 1848 (as Marx did), needed a remarkable degree of confidence to keep up their hope.

When Midgley makes her famous comparison of philosophy to plumbing, she explains that what she means by this is that philosophy is necessary, and that its job is to reveal and fix (or if needed change) the broken assumptions most of our key ideas and values rest on. If philosophers only engage with philosophical topics at universities that are only interesting for specialists, their job of fixing the underlying assumptions of social debates is left undone, and as a result of this we all suffer because confusion takes over. Philosophy can change things. This is not easy to see once the changes have happened and everyone is using the new basic assumptions. We only notice that such a change in our basic

assumptions took place when we look back a good deal later and realize that we cannot make sense of what those working before us thought and felt. Such is the case sometimes with the German Romantics, or the political thought of the early Middle Ages. Of course, politicians and business often try to hijack what academics do: this has happened in the last 40 years as well. Universities have been enlisted to train professionals, and to do the job of businesses and ministries, preparing their administrators for their work. The work of academics is closely monitored and they are expected to specialize and publish in their field on specialist topics. This way knowledge is cut up, dried, and much of it becomes irrelevant. The synthesis with other fields goes missing. Interdisciplinarity and creativity are praised in words, but time, freedom and money to enable them are not forthcoming.

In times of crisis like this many turn to the past to escape or to try to figure out what to do. In the present this led to resurgence of racism and nationalism. Those paths are not walkable. We need to look forward and this is where we need the poets and other artists. Due to the overspecialization problem, much of art and academic fields have been cut off from each other. We need to educate ourselves, and to learn about the current diagnosis and possible solutions from Sociologists and Economists, from Political Theorists and Analysts, and from people working on understanding how political propaganda and marketing are sometimes used to mislead voters, to understand the problems and to see how we can circumvent them, or destroy them. That's where we need the poets with their fantasy, to paint a map of the possibilities, to inspire, to motivate.

There have been artists before who have used their creativity for good purposes: think about the great figures of emancipation who educated generations in empathy. Think for example about Dickens, George Eliot, or more recently of Alice Munroe or Tony Harrison. They don't deal in explicit arguments or conceptual clarification, but they do manage to make us feel that certain facts like poverty or hunger make us do things that we would not do under better

circumstances, to highlight that the world is at fire, and that make us experience the heat of the fire. Again, of course imagination can be misused. I already mentioned Pound, but I could also name Theodor Seuss "Ted" Geisel, known as Dr. Seuss by most, who created some of the vilest and most effective racist propaganda against Asians before and during WWII at the request of the US military.

But if we can find good people, people who want to use imagination for good, then we can change politics and power for the better. And the troops of philosopher-plumbers can support them to fix the basic assumptions in the right way. If the poets – visual artists, web designers, musicians, performance artists, painters - can highlight values that are useful for people to change politics, bring to life touching examples, and help people to make their thinking and feeling more flexible, then progress is possible. Philosophers can help to sort out the possible options among moral values, different political structures, and to guide us through the maze of reasons for and against distinct ways of changing society in way that enables more people to lead happy, fulfilled lives.

Of course, there is a danger of despair. We know that literature and philosophy often only manage to record what happened. They arrive too late to change anything and can only expose how people lived through dark times. Not too long ago, in May 2020, I had a request from a private student living in Hong Kong. At that time, it was becoming increasingly obvious that the dictators ruling mainland China, the people who robbed their population of the freedoms they fought a long-long civil war for, will also swallow down Hong Kong and turn it into just another cog in the machine. The student who approached me wanted me to talk to her about some works of the best Hungarian poets who worked during the times when Hungary was forced to be part of the Soviet Union. I prepared for her a lecture about the work of György Petri, one of the smart and insightful poets who captured some of the evil ways in which the Hungarian-Soviet system treated citizens. This helped my student to emotionally and

mentally prepare herself for what was coming. She wanted to know what to expect. Petri's poetry forged a connection between the Hungary of the 1970s and the Hong Kong of the future, and helped someone to see what was coming.

What we need is to forge connections among people, and to help them see what the future can be. If we have a vision and an ideal, it is easier to muster the will. Just as my student from Hong Kong was preparing herself emotionally to be able to deal with what was coming for them once China changed the laws governing them, so we can give ourselves and others the tools to prepare for the future's political dangers and opportunities. Our passions, values and motivation are connected to each other. There are many evil people, many of them working in powerful positions. These people know that what they are doing is wrong. And they consciously opt for selfish and bad courses of action, they are ignoring community values, like honesty, justice and compassion, and thereby also ignore the worth of the lives of others. Their course is dictated by their desires and ambitions for their own personal gains. Such political and moral systems cannot bring about happiness for society. To remove the bad people who are preventing change, takes action, and there is no action without motivation and plans. Helping citizens to create plans and to give them motivation to carry them out is what poets and philosophers can do. We cannot wait for others. And we should not retreat underground, to meet at night, like the ancient Christians did during the first centuries. Their hope was kept alive by the promise of eternal happiness after a short time on this Earth. Our hope has to be that we can achieve a good, a better life here, and during our times. If we simply wait, the same faith that came for Hong Kong can come for any of us. The winds of change might come from North, West or East… Defeat can come from outside, but sometimes, it arrives from our own innermost core, ripening and fermenting there. Let this remind us that victory and hope can come in the same way as defeat, from our innermost core. We can nourish, harden and temper our ideas and draw them as resources for a better future. This is how I see know the role of philosophers and poets, close to the end first year of the Coronavirus.

What happened, what it highlighted, and what we can do

We need to dream. We need to close our eyes. Use our imagination.

Concentrate on the things that are important.

Where do we want to go? Where do we want to arrive at?

We want to wake up in a world where everyday kindness and helpfulness is celebrated. People are willing to cross their boundaries and reach out a hand. A comment on a pretty flower in our neighbour's garden is readily given and well received. Being helpful and lending a hand to someone with heavy bags can be trusted and accepted.

We need to act. Many of us think that we can just sit back and leave everything to the politicians. One of the riskiest ideologies people have gone in for during the last 70 years was the one that preached: "just leave everything to the economists and the politicians. They will sort it out." Since then we've gone through several market crashes and financial crises, and especially since the 1970s we have seen productivity fall, ownership and income inequality rise, and public social services getting strangled, becoming ever harder to access. We've opened the university doors, but only to train masses of people to work for businesses and to educate them in a mentality that puts financial considerations at the heart of everything. Such thinking should not have rule over our hospitals, social workers' networks, public housing, and fundamental infrastructure.

We need to wake up. We need to wake up to a giant rumbling; to the crumbling sound of a thousand corrupt people's private empires collapsing. To the wail of the hatemongers going to jail.

And by the time the sun rises and nears the peak of its trajectory, the air will be filled with the chirping of birds. With the smells of food cooking for everyone. With the sound of musicians tuning their instruments for celebrations.

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Born 1959. So far published 13 books of poetry including A Laughing Bug (1991), The World Congress of Middle Aged (2002 Yamamoto Kenichi Award), Afternoon of Forbidden Words, (2003 Hagiwara Sakutaro Award), Prisoner of Japanese (2012 Ayukawa Nobuo Award), Drip Drop Monotony, Sloppily, Wildly (2017) and Novel (2017). English translations include Family Room and Poems of MINASHITA KIRYU, YOTSUMOTO YASUHIRO & SOH SAKON (both from VagabondPress).

Published two full length novels, The Fake Poet (2015), and The Song Diary of a Prostate Gland (2018), which followed the classic style of combining verses and proses.

Yasuhiro is also active in the areas of translation (Kid by Simon Armitage, Poems of Homosapiens, Stay on the Earth!) and literary criticism (Shuntarology, a thesis on the poetics of Shuntaro Tanikawa and the collected essays To Dear Poets!)

Since 2006, Yasuhiro has been Japanese national editor of Poetry International Web, introducing contemporary Japanese poetry through English translations. He is also on editorial board for the poetry magazine Beagle in Japan. Yasuhiro has been away from Japan since 1986 and living in Munich, Germany for the past 25 years.

https://www.poetryinternational.org/pi/poet/27175/Yasuhiro-Yotsumoto/en/tile

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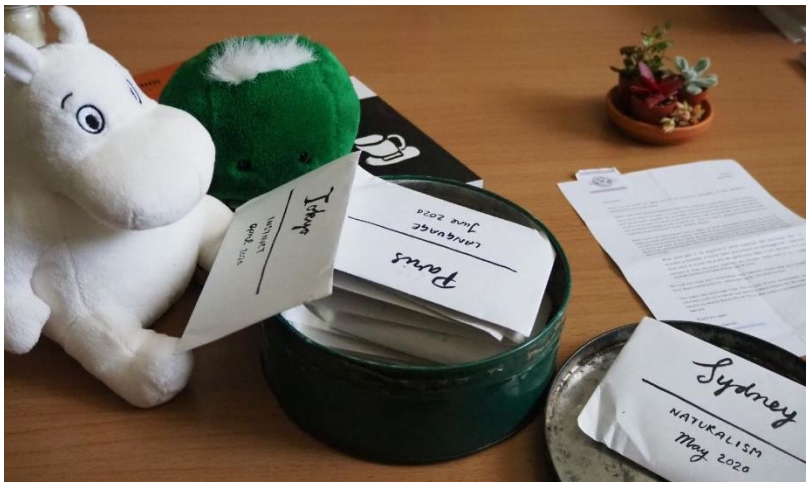
Mary Midgley's Biscuit Tin in Japan



Please check out The Notes from a Biscuit Tin Project, which set our exchange into motion
https://www.notesfromabiscuittin.com/about/

and its Tokyo-event information site with some extra materials
https://www.notesfromabiscuittin.com/project/tokyo/

Instagram
https://www.instagram.com/notesfromabiscuittin/

Philosopher Shoko Kinoshita has kindly translated one of Mary's central essays, 'The Concept of Beastliness', into Japanese. It can be found online at https://www.notesfromabiscuittin.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-concept-of-beastliness-translation.pdf

István's reflections on the connections between Midgley's philosophy and the COVID-19 crisis have been published in the Berlin Review of Books https://berlinbooks.org/brb/2020/07/mary-midgley-and-that-beastly-illusion/