



INTERIORS

EDUCATORS' GUIDE

FALL 2017



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the **Fall 2017 *Asymptote* Educators' Guide**. With each new issue, we release this guide to provide materials designed to support educators who want to integrate *Asymptote* content into their classrooms.

We hope that *Asymptote*'s educational materials find their way into a wide range of classrooms and contexts, across regions and disciplines, and so we have tried to design a flexible resource that can supplement various learning environments. This guide is arranged into **six sections**, each representing a different classroom concept which we believe can be reinforced through the study of world literature in translation and includes lesson plans for each concept.

The [Fall 2017 issue of *Asymptote*](#), themed “**Interiors**”, addresses experiences that might initially seem difficult for an outsider to access, from intimate, personal perspectives. We hear from a world-renowned translator and an immigrant writer about their crafts. The daughter of political asylum seekers speaks about the moments that have shaped her identity. The night before an execution, we hear from the executioner, the prisoner, and the victim. Our narrators bravely and artfully share their interiors with us, their readers. We hope the following materials will help you to engage with the abovementioned concepts at their intersections with this versatile theme and with the work already occurring in your classroom.

We realize that the appropriate age ranges for each lesson will vary widely, so we encourage educators to adjust these lessons to meet their needs, and to record these modifications. Your classroom experience is very important to us, and hearing about it helps us to improve our offerings. Please leave **feedback and suggestions** [here](#).

Finally, if you like what we do and want to get involved, we would love to hear more from you! We are currently seeking **contributors** willing to share **thoughts** and **experiences** about teaching world literature through the *Asymptote* blog. We'd especially love to read and share your **anecdotes** from the lessons you teach based on this guide, or using other *Asymptote* content. Let your stories inspire others! *Asymptote* for Educators is interested in publishing **student work** as well. If your students have produced excellent responses to the assignments offered in this guide, other work to do with *Asymptote* content, or if they want to participate in the global conversation about translated literature as it relates to them, we are currently accepting submissions. Finally, if you like what you see, but you haven't quite found the perfect lesson to fill the gap in your syllabus, *Asymptote* for Educators is now offering to work with you **personally** to create lessons just for your classroom.

If you're interested in contributing, collaborating, or if you'd like to give us additional feedback, please contact us at **education@asymptotejournal.com**.

ECOPOETICS

Representing Place Through the Eyes of Children

In her [review](#) of Julia Fiedorczuk's *Oxygen: Selected Poems* (which appears in *Asymptote's Summer 2017 issue*), Elisa González introduces a sophisticated definition of ecopoetics to her readers:

Fiedorczuk and the Mexican writer Gerardo Beltrán posit ecopoetics as “an integrative practice leading to the production of new ways of knowing and living.” They wish to resolve the opposition between the supposed “objective knowledge” of science and the “spiritual realm of the arts.” This is one step toward reconceiving human/non-human relationships, necessary because the traditional narrative of human exceptionalism and mastery is destroying the planet. The practice of ecopoetics generates—or germinates—fresh metaphors, altering the “individual and collective imaginations” to create a narrative for the future that embraces the duties of interconnectedness. The essay is an explicit “defense of poetry” as capable of more than beauty, but it resists “poetry can save the world” truisms. The practice they describe is “not limited to . . . the writing and reading of poetry”; however, poetry, as “a source of knowledge and wisdom as well as a vital creative force” has the power to transform the imagination. Ecopoetics, as described by Fiedorczuk and Beltrán, can and must expand beyond the page. It is the practice of “home-making,” represented in the word itself: “eco” from oikos, the Greek word for “home”; “poetics” from poiesis, the word for “making.”

In this section, we examine *Asymptote* features that engage with this practice of “homemaking.”

From This Issue: Mikhail Karikis' [The Sonic Strata of the Real and the Imagined](#)

Learning Objectives:

Students will

- Examine how images, sounds, and perspective work together to create setting in a film

Approximate Grade Level(s): Middle School

Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 50 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Projector
- Internet access to [The Sonic Strata of the Real and the Imagined](#)
- Speakers connected to the computer
- Writing materials

Lesson Plan

Pre-Class Activity

At the end of the previous day's lesson, show the students *Children of Unquiet* and *Ain't Got No Fear* (the two video pieces in [The Sonic Strata of the Real and the Imagined](#)) using the projector. No discussion is necessary at this point. For homework, have students write a paragraph in response to the following prompt:

“*Children of the Unquiet* and *Ain't Got No Fear* remind me of _____ because _____”

Make sure that you as the teacher read the interview accompanying the videos in order to inform your guidance of the discussion.

Warm-Up Activity

Watch the two video clips again as a class. Ask students to share their paragraphs from the previous night.

In-Class Activity I – Perspective

Split students into small groups. Assign *Children of the Unquiet* to half the groups and *Ain't Got No Fear* to the other half. Have them discuss the following questions:

- What is this film about?
- What's happening in the film?
- Who do you think these kids are, and what's their relation to the environment?

Come back together as a class and discuss each film in turn. Have the groups that focused on that film share their findings before allowing everyone else to weigh in. Then share the following basic background information about the films:

Children of the Unquiet takes place in Larderello, a region in Italy that produces a lot of geothermal energy. In the film, children take over a village where families of the energy-plant workers used to live. Since many of the plants have been automated, machines do a lot of the work that people did in the past. As a result, a lot of people have lost their jobs, and some villages, including this one, have been abandoned.

Ain't Got No Fear takes place on the Isle of Grain, which used to be an industrial region. A lot of people worked for the oil company, BP. Much of the industry has left the area, leaving residents without work. Grain isn't well connected to cities by public transportation, and there isn't much to do there. Kids and teenagers have to be creative about entertaining themselves.

Mikhail Karikis, the artist who created the films, went to these regions and asked the kids to work on these projects with him. He organized the projects and gave creative guidance, but the main goal was for the kids to choose how to represent themselves and their world. They showed him their favorite places, shared their hopes and dreams, and reproduced the sounds of their environment. As a result, the films show the world from the kids' perspectives.

Have each student independently write down a brief answer to the question: "How do you think these films would be different if the kids' parents worked with the artist instead of the kids themselves? Do you think you'd recognize the places as the same?" Then call on some students to share their answers.

In-Class Activity II – Landscape and Soundscape

Have the students close their eyes. Play *Children of the Unquiet*, asking students to focus their attention on the sounds. Then conduct a class discussion about the following questions:

- How do the sounds make you feel?
- What do you think makes the different sounds?
- What do the sounds remind you of?

Next, turn off the volume and play the video again. Ask the students to describe what they see and how it makes them feel. Ask also if the images remind them of any place that they know from their own lives.

Repeat the activity with *Ain't Got No Fear*. Then ask students if it changed their impressions of the environments in the films to experience the sound and the visuals separately.

Closing Activity

Ask the students to choose one of the films and to complete the following on a piece of paper:

Describe the setting of the film in three sentences. Then list three sounds and three images from the film that cause you to describe the setting that way.

Home Assignment

Have students fill out the worksheet on the following page.

Pretend you met Mikhail Karikis on the street in your hometown. He wants to make a film in which you show him how you want to represent your community. Fill in the chart to describe the short film that you would make together.

| About Your Home | |
|---|---------------|
| <u>Question</u> | <u>Answer</u> |
| What sounds do you hear every day? | |
| What colors do you see every day? | |
| What does the natural environment look like? | |
| What do the houses and other buildings look like? | |
| What do you like about where you live? | |
| What do you dislike about where you live? | |
| What problems does your community face? | |
| What do you hope for your future? | |
| About Your Film | |
| What will happen in your film? | |
| What will the soundtrack be? | |
| Who will the characters be? | |
| What costumes will the characters wear? | |

LITERATURE IN WORLD CONTEXT

Context and Interpretation

From This Issue: Marina Tsvetaeva's [Four Poems](#), translated by Margaree Little

Learning Objective:

Students will:

- Interpret poetry using evidence from the text
- Critically analyze the relationship between text, context, and interpretation
- Create artwork inspired by the poems they have read

Approximate Grade Level(s): High School Level

Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 1 hour

Materials Needed:

- Copies of [Four Poems](#) printed without the bios or translator's note (one per student)
- Projector connected to a computer with internet access
- Paints and brushes
- Paper suitable for painting

Lesson Plan

Introduction

[Please read the translator's note and Marina Tsvetaeva's bio for additional context]. Tsvetaeva is one of the most renowned Russian poets of the 20th century. Born in Moscow, she lived from 1892 to 1941. Her father was a professor and the founder of the Museum of Fine Arts, and her mother was a concert pianist. Tsvetaeva's life coincided with a very turbulent time in Russia's history, and though born into a wealthy family, she suffered great loss and poverty during this time. In this lesson, students will question how important it is to understand the context of her poetry in order to fully appreciate it.

Pre-Class Activity

Hand out printed copies of [Four Poems](#), without the bios or translator's note, for the students to read for homework. Have them identify and look up any words they don't know.

Warm-Up Activity

Ask students to read through the poems again and to highlight any color-related imagery (for example: bruising, ray of light, white, fire, rust, red wounds, red rags) and underline any words that describe emotions (for example: anger, ragged, honest, excess, love, rotten, shaky, confused, secrets, passions, insolent, apologetic, invisible).

In-Class Activity I – Context and Interpretation

Using their annotations from the warm-up exercise, split students into pairs or small groups to discuss the following questions:

- How do these poems make you feel?
- Which words and images evoke those feelings in you?
- Do these poems give you a sense of the time or place that they describe? If so, how?
- Are you curious about the context in which the poems were written? Why or why not?
- Do the poems remind you of anything that you've experienced in your own life?

Come back together as a class so the students can share their insights. When each pair or group has had a chance to speak, show them the author bio and translator's note from the *Asymptote* page. Ask them to each individually write a few sentences about whether and how the context of the author's life impacts their appreciation and understanding of the poetry.

In-Class Activity II – Poetry and Painting

Point out to students that, just as knowing the context in which a poem was written can affect a reader's interpretation, the unique context of the reader herself can also. Explain that, in order to illustrate how different readers can see the same text in different ways, they are going to produce paintings based on one of the [Four Poems](#).

For those who are struggling to start their painting, ask them to go back to the annotations they made during the warm-up activity. They can choose some of these words to use as a stimulus for their picture.

Have students write a one-paragraph reflection about the process of painting. Make sure they address the following questions:

- What elements of the poem made it into your painting?
- How did you choose those elements?

Closing Activity

Have students share their paintings and discuss their reflections. Be sure to reiterate how the paintings show that different readers experience the same poem differently, and that all interpretations are valid, as long as they are supported by elements from the text. Collect the students' reflection paragraphs.

Home Assignment

Have students choose one stanza from one poem to analyze in a short paper. The paper should have five paragraphs:

1. An introduction with a thesis statement
2. Support for the thesis statement based only on the words in the stanza
3. Support for the thesis statement based on the information in the bio and translator's note
4. The student's personal feeling about the relationship between the stanza and the thesis statement
5. A conclusion that restates the thesis in light of the supporting information

TRANSLATION THEORY

Portrait of a Translator

Too often we talk about what is lost in translation. By drawing attention to *Asymptote's* more experimental features, we can witness instead what we stand to gain politically, artistically, and conceptually from the process of translation. Translation involves an endless set of choices. In this section we offer lessons that encourage students to identify and critically analyze these intentional choices and their effects. We also hope to engage a non-anglocentric understanding of the act of translation, in recognition of the fact that our conception of the process is already mediated by the dominant culture of translation.

From This Issue: Bernard Hoepffner's [*Portrait of the Translator as Con-Man*](#), translated by S.D. Chrostowska

Learning Objectives:

Students will

- Critically analyze the role of the translator as described in the text
- Perform a close reading
- Use evidence from the text to support their interpretations

Approximate Grade Level(s): High School Level

Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 1 hour

Materials Needed:

- Copies of [*Portrait of the Translator as Con-Man*](#) (one per student)
- Projector or a white/chalk board
- Highlighter pens (enough for one per student)

Lesson Plan

Introduction

[Please read the translator's note for additional context]. Bernard Hoepffner is considered one of France's most celebrated translators of English fiction. He spoke French, English, German, and Spanish, and he said that what made him feel closest to an author was "the feeling when some of the authors I have translated...had written in their language what I wanted to write myself, so I simply had to translate them." He offers many ways to conceptualize the identity of the translator – as transparent, hybrid, chameleon, invisible, everyday, and a craftsman, to name but a few. Hoepffner's writing is at once inherently playful and thought provoking. The piece is an ideal starting point for students to discuss the role of a translator and the challenges of one who, as Hoepffner states, is "constantly faced with contradictory choices."

Pre-Class Activity

Have students read through [*Portrait of the Translator as Con-Man*](#) prior to the lesson. They don't need to make any notes at this stage as they'll do so in class.

Warm-Up Activity

Ask students to read through the piece again and to highlight any points of interest. Have them underline any descriptions of the identity of translator (for example: Everyday Translator, Transparent Translator, Invisible Translator, Traitor, Con-Man, Acrobat, Craftsman, Chameleon)

and of translation (for example: shimmering, linearity, literality, literariness, craftsmanship, craftiness, versatility, trickery, strata).

In-Class Activity I – No Single Identity

Divide the class into groups and ask each group to consider *at least one* of the following images below, and used by Hoepffner within his text, to describe the role of translator:

1. Like an island
2. Everyday Translator
3. Transparent Translator
4. Invisible Translator
5. Hybrid
6. Chameleon
7. Being made up of a number of strata
8. Like an acrobat dancing on a tightrope stretched on the ground
9. Translator as craftsman

Ask each pair/group to unpack the description you've assigned by performing a close reading of the passage in which it appears. Students can use the following question to guide their discussion: What does this description and the surrounding passage tell you about the act of translation and the role of the translator? Remind students to support their claims with evidence from this text. Then have each group present their interpretations to the class.

In-Class Activity II – A Translator's Instructions for Authors

Hoepffner lists 'Instructions for Authors' to best support the translator. Ask students to read through this extract in pairs and work with their partners to answer the following questions:

- What does this list tell you about the relationship between translators and authors?
- As neither an author nor a translator, but a reader, does this list give you any instructions as to how to read a translation? If so, what? If not, why do you think this section is included in the piece?
- Based on the rest of the piece, would you add anything to the list? If so, what?

Closing Activity

At the conclusion of the piece, Hoepffner writes that "If it is true that we are being transformed when reading books written in our own language, how much more when we are reading translations from other countries and other languages." Share this quote with the students and then, with the same partner as before, have them discuss whether they agree or disagree. Ask them to find evidence from the piece (particularly the section on the translator-as-chameleon) to support their statements, and to be prepared to share with the class.

Home Assignment

Ask students to complete the task of translator using the resource available from The Poetry Society [here](#).

GENDER STUDIES

To Give Life and to Take it Away

*** *Translator Hodna Bentali Gharsallah Nuernberg has made herself available for a Q&A with your class via Skype or e-mail. Please contact education@asymptotejournal.com for arrangements.*

From This Issue: from Valentine Goby's [*Touch My Body and I'll Kill You*](#), translated by Hodna Bentali Gharsallah Nuernberg

Learning Objective:

Students will

- Cite evidence from a text to support their interpretation
- Differentiate between the way a text describes a set of gender norms and the way it comments upon them

Approximate Grade Level(s): Upper-level High School, Undergraduate Level

Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 50 minutes

Materials Needed:

- [*Touch My Body and I'll Kill You*](#) (one per student)
- Writing materials

Lesson Plan

Pre-Class Activity

Have students read and annotate [*Touch My Body and I'll Kill You*](#) for homework.

Warm-Up Activity

Conduct a brief discussion about the students' first impressions. You can open with the question, "Did you like the text? Why or why not?"

In-Class Activity I – Gender and the Individual

Split the class into pairs or small groups. Assign one of the three main characters, Lucie, Marie, or Henri, to each group. More than one group can work on the same character. Looking only at the passages written from their own character's point of view, have students:

- Underline all explicitly gendered descriptions, words, and images (having to do with man, woman, manhood, womanhood, etc.).
- Highlight all implicitly gendered descriptions, words, and images (having to do with, for example, parenting, gender role expectations, etc.).
- Describe the character's own voice and that of the third person narrator when referring to the character.

In-Class Activity II – Gender and the Society

Come back together as a class. Use the following prompts to facilitate a discussion about the students' findings from the previous activity. Encourage students to use the passages they've already identified to support their claims:

- Describe the similarities and differences between the characters' voices and the language the narrator uses to talk about each character.
- Describe how gender functions in the story. In the world of the text, what does society expect of women and men? Are those expectations strict or fluid?
- How do the characters view themselves in relation to those expectations?
- Does the text itself depict gender roles and expectations in a positive or negative light (or some of both)? Does the text abide by the gender roles it describes or subvert them? How?

Closing Activity

Take a moment to clear up any lingering questions and introduce the homework assignment. Then ask students to think back to their first impressions about the text. Have they changed during the discussion? If so, how?

Home Assignment

Have students use the class discussion to write a paper addressing one of the following prompts:

- Discuss the theme of birth and death in light of the class discussion about gender. How do these two themes function together in the text?
- The story takes place in France during the early 20th century. Rewrite the story, migrating the characters and the plot to your own time and place. Then write a brief reflection about the process of doing so. In your reflection, be sure to comment upon the ways in which your treatment of gender differs from, or remains the same as, the original story.
- Read Michel Faleme's [Zarma. Yennendi](#). Write a comparison paper about the treatment of gender in the two stories.

WRITING, READING, AND TECHNOLOGY

Scissors, a Paste Pot, and a Copy Machine

Just as new technologies, like writing and the printing press, once changed definitions of what literature was and could be, the internet now challenges us to expand and adapt our understanding of the “literary”. Broadly speaking, new technology impacts literature in the following ways:

- Thematically: Literature set in contemporary society encounters technology just as contemporary humans do.
- Linguistically/formally: Technology creates new vocabulary, new connotations for existing vocabulary, and new conventions for different modes of communication (for example, the way language is used in the news, on Twitter, on Facebook). For writers and artists, these become new materials to incorporate into their creations, pushing traditional boundaries of possibility ever-farther.
- The Digital Archive: Performance and oral literature are no longer bound to the single moment, but can be recorded and shared. Meanwhile, the written word is no longer bound by the static page, but can be affected by reader interaction.
- Digital Humanities: The intersection of traditional humanities studies and computational research and data analysis.

Asymptote's online platform exemplifies the ways in which digital archives can bridge various forms of media, and in so doing, challenge the frontiers of literature. *Asymptote* brings together texts and creators from across the world, and presents this work in ways that traditional print cannot—through audio recordings, videos, and visuals. In this section, we hope to offer lessons that use *Asymptote* features to encourage fruitful critical analysis of the points of contact between literature and technology.

From This Issue: From Bibi Slipers' [Photostat Machine](#), translated by Alice Inggs

Learning Objectives:

Students will

- Examine how sound creates meaning in poetry
- Critically analyze a text through the lens of the technology with which it engages
- Evaluate the relationship between social media and creative expression

Approximate Grade Level(s): Upper-level High School, Undergraduate Level

Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 1 hour

Materials Needed:

- [Photostat Machine](#) (one per student)
- Writing Materials

Lesson Plan

Pre-Class Activity

Have students read [Photostat Machine](#) and its translator's note for homework, underline their favorite phrase, and research one of the references in one of the poems. For example, they can listen to Regina Spektor, look up Yayoi Kusama, or read up on the history of Instagram filters or emojis and bring in any interesting articles they find.

Warm-Up Activity

Have every student read aloud their favorite phrase. Then discuss some of the information they learned about the cultural references. To close the discussion, ask if they felt differently about the poems before learning more about what inspired them.

In-Class Activity I – Reprinting Sounds

In her translator's note, Alice Inggs says that she, "worked to create something like an imprint or reprint of the originals, reproducing (as far as possible) structure, rhythm, rhyme, tone, and metaphor." Share this quote with the class.

Then have a student read "from 'Mix Tape'" out loud. Give students a few minutes to:

- Highlight repeating sounds
- Underline repeating phrases
- Write one or two sentences answering the question: "How does sound affect your understanding of the poem?"
- Write one or two sentences answering the question: "How does the poem's title affect your understanding of it?"

Briefly discuss the students' answers.

Repeat the activity with "Exploration of the Nature of Obsession with Specific Reference to the Polkadot-Artworks of Yayoi Kusama." As part of your discussion of this poem, students can compare their answers with those from the previous poem.

In-Class Activity II – Art and Social Media

Split the class into pairs or small groups. Assign "Emoji in the Scriptorium" to half the groups and "15 Instagram Poems" to the other half. Have each group discuss the following set of questions, supporting their answers with examples from the text:

- What's happening in this poem?
- How does their appearance in the context of a poem affect the meanings of the familiar features of social media (emojis and Instagram filters)?
- How, in turn, do the preexisting meanings of the features of social media factor into your interpretation of the poems? Can you imagine how the poems would be different if they were about the same topics, but didn't sample social media directly?
- What do the poems have to say about the relationship between social media and art? Is there a positive or negative value judgment in the text? Or both? Do you agree or disagree?

Come back together as a class and have the groups share their answers.

Closing Activity

Have each student individually write a paragraph or two about the title of the collection, [*Photostat Machine*](#), in light of the earlier discussions. They can address the following prompts:

- What images and ideas does the title bring to mind?

- How does the title affect your interpretations of the poems? You can reference earlier class discussions to inform your answers.

Collect the students' writing as they leave class.

Home Assignment

Have students choose a digital/social media source, pick 10-15 words, phrases, or images from it, and use them to create a poem. The poem can be entirely made of this sampled material, or the material can be embedded within their own words. Then have them write a brief reflection that addresses the following questions:

- Does this poem feel like *your* creation? Why or why not?
- Does the sampled material mean something different in your poem than it did in its source? How or how not?
- Reflect on the process of creating the poem
- What do you think is successful and unsuccessful about the final product?

OR

Have students revisit the title, [Photostat Machine](#). Ask them to write a brief essay in response to the following question:

"How does the notion of the photostat machine function in the collection? In relation to art and creation, is it a piece of technology that the text considers positive, negative, or neutral? Use examples from the text to support your claims."

CRITICAL WRITING: BEYOND THE FIVE PARAGRAPH ESSAY

Rethinking Critical Analysis

At some point or another, most young writers are exposed to the five-paragraph essay: introduction, three body paragraphs of supporting examples, and conclusion. This is for good reason. The five-paragraph essay teaches students how to make themselves understood by crafting an organized argument. However, once this skill set is mastered, we believe the model can become restrictive. *Asymptote* offers abundant examples of artful critical and expository writing and opportunities for students to practice such writing themselves.

From This Issue: Henry Ace Knight's [An Interview with Akhil Sharma](#) and from Maryam Madjidi's [Marx and the Doll](#), translated by Ruth Diver

Learning Objectives:

Students will

- Analyze and evaluate the structure of an interview
- Craft a set of interview questions rooted in textual and contextual analysis
- Evaluate the potential for critical analysis of a text in the form of an interview

Approximate Grade Level(s): Undergraduate Level

Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 50 minutes

Materials Needed:

- [An Interview with Akhil Sharma](#) (one per student)
- [Marx and the Doll](#) (one per student)
- Writing Materials

Lesson Plan

Pre-Class Activity

Have students read and annotate [An Interview with Akhil Sharma](#) and [Marx and the Doll](#) (including the bios and the translator's note) for homework. Ask them to choose a favorite question and answer from the interview. The two don't necessarily have to go together.

Warm-Up Activity

Have students share their favorite questions and answers. Note whether or not the best questions yielded the best answers.

In-Class Activity I – Analyzing an Interview

Split students into pairs or small groups and answer the following questions:

- What's your general impression of Sharma and his work? Identify examples from the text that give rise to those impressions.
- The interview is organized in such a way that a reader who's never encountered Sharma before can follow it and remain interested. Identify and describe that organizational structure.
 - (For the teacher: Answers may vary, but if students are struggling, consider offering or guiding them towards the following:
 - Introduction (including only relevant and interesting information)
 - Sharma's start as a writer

- The novel that launched him to fame
- The short story collection, his latest work
- His writing techniques
- His future
- Can you find anything superfluous, inconsistent, or out of place in the interview? If so, what is it and how?

Come back together as a class to discuss the students' answers and, in doing so, compile a list of features of a successful interview.

In-Class Activity II – Crafting an Interview

Have students briefly and independently review their copies of [Marx and the Doll](#). Then, ask them to craft a set of interview questions for author Maryam Madjidi based on the following:

- The earlier class discussion about successful interviewing
- Their analysis of the text
- Their opinions of the text
- The information they have about Madjidi from the text, the bio, and the translator's note

Collect their interview questions before the end of class.

Closing Activity

Come back together as a class to discuss the following prompt: Can crafting an interview achieve the same goals as other forms of critical analysis? How and how not?

Home Assignment

Have each student write a short story based on one of the following prompts drawn from Sharma's comments about his own writing process. Note that, by putting the words from the interview into practice, you are performing a sort of close reading:

- *"Whenever I would finish a draft I would begin with a blank screen and start writing it again, from page one. That forced me to remain true, be very conscious of whether or not this thing is reading fast, if it's reading the way I want it to read. That's what I was interested in. The pattern of the novel was protected because it got rewritten every time."*
Prompt: Write at least three drafts of the same story. Turn in all three along with a brief reflection on the experience. Be sure to discuss what stayed the same and what changed through the drafts, which you like the best, and why.
- ***"What I did was remove certain elements of the sensorium. There's very little sound in the novel. There's very little smell. There's very little feel . . . What's left is largely the visual. The dialogue serves as sound.' How did you develop your ear for dialogue?***
For me the dialogue comes from the character, trying to get a clear sense of what the characters want. Dialogue is just dramatized action. So being aware of what the characters want and how they are trying to get it. That's what makes it feel real. You can feel the jostling that's going on with the characters. That's what I focus on."
Prompt: Write a story in which the descriptive writing has very little sensory information besides the visual, and the dialogue acts as the soundtrack. Separately, create a brief bio for each speaking character which states what they want and how they are trying to get it.
- ***"One doesn't want to handle a subject in the way that the subject demands to be handled . . . If you were to handle the subject based on the way that it demands to be handled, it would become less life-like,' you've said of the coeval humor and morbidity in Family Life. What does that approach look like at the sentence level***

for you?

The sentences remain similar. There are very few flights of fancy. The sentence lengths vary but not that much. If you're applying the same voice to serious and unserious things, if what you're seeing is people trying to take care of themselves and behaving selfishly in situations where one's behavior is both honest and selfish, and create a sense of recognition for the reader, and a sort of laughter at how clearly these characters are able to see their own weirdness—that tends to be the big focus for me."

Prompt: Write a story using the same style to describe two dramatically different situations and in which the same character shows two dramatically different aspects of their personality. Then, write a brief reflection about what makes your style consistent, and what makes the character's personality coherent.

- ***"Can you tell us something about your view of the term "immigrant writer," a subject which you've recently written about in the New York Times? Has your outlook as a novelist shifted at all since the election of Donald Trump?"***

I still think of myself as just a writer, but I'm much more willing to accept the label of an immigrant writer. It means I write about immigrants in the same way that other people write about white people. I don't think, Look at this guy, he's a white writer. It just seems like a goofy way to describe things."

Prompt: Write a story about someone just like you without explicitly discussing what makes them just like you.

FEEDBACK

Thanks for taking the time to read the *Asymptote* Guide for Educators. We hope you found it useful and engaging. Have questions, comments, critiques, or testimonials? Please leave your feedback [here](#). We look forward to hearing from you!

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