

CONVERSATIONS

the only acceptable formula / is to excavate in oneself / until the map is found

- Mario Benedetti

BEER at Ishibashi

Z: I studied journalism, she said in her guttural Japanese, later on I worked one year, just one, for a rural newspaper. Mainly about social problems...

(Z = Zae, Chinese, 26 years old, M = Me)

M: Did you study photography, too?

Z: Yes, yes – she said with enthusiasm– I took several courses in Shanghai.

M: How I envy you, I always wanted to study literature, or journalism, but I think I'm now too shy to be a journalist.

Z: Well, you could write articles about economics ...

M: Yeah, maybe... (No, not really)

Z: (She plucked some green grass from the common plate with her chopsticks and carried them to her mouth)

M: And, with regard to Chinese literature, Which author would you recommend? Some months ago I read *Shanghai Baby*.

Z: *Shanghai Baby*? Mmm, it's not a great novel. The international public think it's revolutionary just 'cause it talks about sex (she laughs). It is true that Shanghai is very different to Beijing or the provinces. But sex is the least important thing. It's an inconsistent novel.

M: The start gripped me, but the end didn't.

Z: Exactly. She pulls out a white flag and says: but I am not like that, huh? I am not like them,

I'm a good girl.

M: (Our chopsticks traversing the diversity of tastes at the table) I would like to write a novel... Sometimes I ask myself what I'm doing here, studying something which will carry me I don't know where, wasting my time.

Z: I understand. Me too, I've been here several years, and we are the same age. My friends are developing professionally: writers, journalists, finance or exports, whatever they do. They get better posts, publish books. And I ask myself: what am I doing here, in Japan? I miss very much my world in China, I miss myself. I read my friend's messages on the internet and I feel that it's on the screen I can see myself again. In their messages, I am reflected and so is the past. And I say to myself: ah, I was like that. And I can see time from outside and I can see where I am going.

M: (I didn't say anything)

Z: My friends in China only see themselves, their lives, their problems, they only think: me, me, me. A good writer should be able to reflect the life and problems of human beings different from him. Only those who have seen things with their own eyes, who have experienced several positions during life, can narrate from a viewpoint beyond their own.

M: (Mute. You shall read the definition of M and tell if I am not distant from such instance)

NICOTINE at Kyoto's river

L: To write... Why? It's much more important to have a family. If you are searching for transcendence – which is what all writers are looking for – that is the only way: giving birth to your children, raising them, giving yourself to them. In the end, they are the only ones who will love you, the ones who will be connected to you forever, and you will live in them, even after you die.

(L = Lisa, Australian, 23 years old)

M: Your children are not your possession. They are free entities who will perhaps choose not to be connected with you, not to continue your frustrated dreams. In any case, if what you are looking for is transcendence – which is the connection after death that you maintain only a mother can attain – it is in a book that a person can live forever, and the connection between a reader and a book is a choice made with freedom, not designed by the randomness of where you have been born. It is a true connection. There are authors who, for me, are my close friends.

L: But it isn't the author, it isn't the person with whom you connect. It is the text, it is a mass of words, premeditated and static. The author does not know you, neither are you of his interest. There is no true love, not in the one who writes and not in the one who reads- always on the search of himself, not of the author. You do not love, nor are you loved in literature; only daily contact leads to true love. Nobody will ever know what you look like when you just wake up, who you are when you don't write, your fears, your tears at night, your gestures. The reader will not know such things, neither is he interested. A son's or daughter's love is the only possible true love.

M: And what about your partner's love?

L: That kind of love is like a desert. You are alone, always alone. A man is are a mere illusion; he will leave when you least expect it. His love for you is a mere mirage, a necessity for company. Men are lonelier than women because they don't carry their children in their womb. If you keep your senses alert, you can dominate them easily. *Men are like little puppies.*

M: But, what about if you love each other, if you really trust each other?

L: Craig is weak. He doesn't have any money. Leave him. *Heaps of rich men that you can get out there.*

AQUARIUS during English lesson

B: You eat, you work, you sleep, and you shit. That's all. You die, and there's nothing after it.

(B = Baku, Japanese, 11 years old)

B: That's why money is so important, you have to go shopping and have fun, now, 'cause life is so short.

M: And what would you like to be when you grow up? How do you think you can enjoy life?

B: *I'm gonna be a salary man and get married.*

BEER at Ishibashi

M: For you it must be easier to be in Japan, you can read anything you want, with no problem.

Z: I understand all characters, but I cannot read them out loud, I don't know how to pronounce them.

M: But you can enjoy a poetry book without carrying your electronic dictionary and spend hours deciphering a poem like me.

Z: It could be, but I miss my language. Japanese language has *hiragana*, it hinders me.

M: To me, it's helpful. Otherwise, how could I conjugate the verbs?

Z: That's the least important thing. Chinese is evocative, literary. Japanese language explains too much. Sometimes, with a bit of imagination and common sense, you can understand the world better, the world of words and the world of humans.

M: One's home country could be the language we were raised in.

Z: Literature is a country in itself, and it's that easy to travel through it.

Secret VODKA at a karaoke.

(J = Joanne, Canadian, 20 years old)

J: I miss my country.

M: What is your country?

J: Nature... Osaka is just concrete; my family...

M: Nostalgia?

J: Well, family you have to leave them anyway, *huh?* I miss my friends... *Sex and drugs!* I cannot find that in Japan!

M: *I know...* We are so free. Think about your mother, your grandma.

J: So free that we are destroyed by anguish in the face of the world of options.

M: But, without that anguish, we wouldn't be free.

J: Where would you like to make your life?

M: It will depend on love.

J: You have to think about yourself, first.

M: Maybe love is like a place, like a new country, full of tourists and few would stay.

J: *'Cause love is beautiful, but not forever.* So think where would you like to live, with or without a man, 'cause when he leaves, you will remain alone in such place you have chosen.

Your boyfriend, Craig, Would he like to live in Mexico?

M: Could one's own country be carried in the luggage?

J: Do whatever you want with your country, but take care of your heart. Unlove does stick into your luggage, and it hurts.

COFFEE at the dorm

(N= Nadja, Moroccan, 25 years old)

N: My home country is a desert... There is nothing. Men leave, to Spain, to France, wherever they can. Women stay, and the children... they stay, become men, and leave. There's no work,

that's the thing. And you... Where do you say you come from?

M: Mexico.

N: *¿Mexico City?*

M: No, from the North, from Sonora.

N: No clue... What is it like there?

M: It's a desert, too. We have a beach where, instead of palms, red flower cactus grows. Men also leave, to the United States...

N: That's why I want to live here, forever. I imagine myself at my hometown station, the sand floating, minuscule in the air, my luggage in the taxi that is falling apart ... And then what? Nothing. It's much better here, I earn five times more than my entire family, with *arubaito*, you know... I am bringing my mother. Aren't you planning to stay as well?

M: I'm tired...

N: Of Japan?

M: *Not exactly.*

N: Of what?

M: Of being afraid.

N: Afraid of what?

M: Of deserts.

ÉXTASIS in Tokyo

C: I love you.

M: I love you, too.

C: Don't ever leave me.

M: I won't.

BEER at Ishibashi

Z: Let's make a promise, here and now: if one day you go to China, you must come to my house.

M: that would be a pleasure! You're very welcome, too. Whenever...

Z: Thank you! Shanghai is two hours flight from here but... Where is your country, exactly?

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