

—ノート—

クリエイティブ・ライティングのこと

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The Old Man in the Zoo

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When I attended the 6th JACET summer seminar,¹ I had my first experience in “creative writing,” which was not only perplexing but also trying. In this course we were often asked to write under unexpected titles, such as “I woke up one morning and found I had been reborn as an opposite sex.” Thus we were always required to get away from our ordinary way of thinking and viewing things. As a final assignment we were told to pick up a stick or a rock, always carry it with us and create a unique character by observing it carefully.

Though it may be next to impossible to immediately introduce this way of writing into English composition classes, it seems desirable to make a good use of it. As I pointed out², many students seem to show interest in “English composition” as well as in “English conversation.” But I discovered to my surprise that most students had no knowledge of building paragraphs. They always began a new line with a new sentence and seemed to have no sense of expressing a particular idea in one paragraph with several sentences. This is partly because they are accustomed to “put into English” one isolated Japanese sentence, and partly because they have had no special training even in writing in Japanese. Such being the case, I think it is urgently necessary to train students in basic rules and skills for paragraph writing, and then we should sometimes have them work in the “creative writing.”

The story that follows³ is an experiment of “creative writing” on the part of the teacher.

THE OLD MAN IN THE ZOO

Out of a taxi that drew up at the gate of the zoological natural garden emerged a medium-sized old man, who got a zoo ticket and went in. Whereas lots of other people walked lazily along looking at the sheep, the bears and the elephants, he walked quickly without showing much interest in the exhibits. It was a sultry summer afternoon and he was perspiring over his deep-furrowed brows, his gray shirt stuck wet on his body in several parts. Suddenly, the old man parted from the main current

of the visitors and stood in front of a large greenhouse in and around which nobody else was to be seen.

The notice on the glass door read, “THE HOUSE FOR BUTTERFLIES. Please shut the door behind you so that the butterflies cannot fly away.” Narrowing his eyes in satisfaction, he pushed the door open and entered. Though it was a bit hotter inside, the ventilation was good. And a marked change had occurred in the old man. He lingered at one place watching

1 The seminar was held at the Inter-University Seminar House, Hachioji, Tokyo from July 26 to August 12, 1972.

2 Cf. “English Education At College,” in the 1972 issue of this bulletin (pp. 1-5).

3 This is mainly based on my work for the final assignment in the “creative writing” course at the JACET seminar.

a big blue butterfly on a wide leaf of a tall birch tree, and later he squatted at another spot examining a small yellow flower of an orchid by a clear spring. On these occasions his dark brown eyes grew brighter and his small thin-lipped mouth was moving in silent whispers.

On one of his collecting tours the old man had been in an open woodland in the tropics. The brilliant sun was glaring down upon the wood and grass where varieties of colorful wild flowers were in bloom and there were lots of rare butterflies flying about. In this heavenly field he was swinging about his net in an excited manner, while his white-bonneted little daughter dressed in pink was running after butterflies or picking up flowers together with her mother in the same dressing. After a few hours' activities they were sitting under the trees, the mother unpacking the lunch box, and the father displaying his large collection of butterflies or telling the names of flowers his wife and their daughter had gathered. That sort of thing had been one of the family's happiest times.

Soon after he left the greenhouse, the old

man was caught in an unexpectedly heavy evening shower and was forced into the nearest rest house for shelter. Wiping his wet gray hair with a crumpled handkerchief, he asked for a cup of hot coffee, seated himself at a table in one corner and started to look around him without even knowing it. There were several couples with their children scattered around in the rest house. In one group the family were all talking merrily to one another. In another, the father was silently smoking, puffing circles of blue smoke out of his mouth, while the mother was cleaning their little daughter's creamy mouth and cheeks with paper napkins. All the groups of people here, it appeared to the old man, were making each a little home.

As the coffee was being served to him, a boy and a girl dashed in from the white torrents outside, hand in hand. Even with water dripping from their hair and clothes the young couple looked delighted with the new experience. At this moment a dark shadow passed across the old man's sun-burnt face, and without even touching his coffee he briskly strode out into the wild outside he himself had taken shelter from several minutes before.