



University of Iowa

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International Writing Program Archive of Residents' Work

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## Writing Sample

Ko Ko Thett

Short texts.

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**ko ko thett  
short texts****Amongst the world's marvellous marbles**

I am the Diamond Marble. I am a cross between the bull's eye atop a top and the screw that caps the fastest fan you can imagine. Each time I wave my hand, lettuce flowers at my fingertips. I swap fake dolls for pearl flakes. Fake pearl flakes for dope dolls. I man every highway road in your land, every highway restaurant, every toddy palm plantation, and every fuel station next to those highway restaurants. The Internet you worship is my property. I am the Patron Saint of your Party. I eat rabid dogs. I feed poisoned meat to your pet. The way I squat-shit on a Western toilet, I sit above your government. It was me who painted a toothbrush moustache on the national gallery portrait of your favourite General. Listen up, Sonny! Unbeknownst to you, your mother was one of my 18,000 fretwork footrests I clubbed with sex. When you were a crawler, sick with anal scabies you contracted from bathing at my charity well, your mom had to rush you to my charity clinic, in one of my charity vehicles. For the sake of your skin hygiene, my sanction wiped out your filthy tribe. You grew up half-cocked, having been thrown into potboilers in the shambolic public library I donated. I caused every episode of depression you drowned in. I bottled every glass of moonshine you drank.

I am *not* for profit.

They call me the Virtuous Circle – I spin so fast, history can't catch up, let alone blackmail me for a rest.

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**Metaphors**

They don't explain. They don't connect.

They don't mean what they say. They don't say what they mean. They don't tell you the whole story. They won't tell you who they are. They make you imagine them so you cannot imagine any others.

Much has been lost. Much has been lost.

In likeness. In precedence. In ranks. In files. In smiles. In frame.

Kidney is bean. Sunshine is lady. Chickpeas peck on peachicks. Aren't they only doing their duty?

From love gaze to hate stare, how is it that unfamiliar is always sacrificed at the altar of overfamiliar?

If you candlelight moonlight, you might as well moonlight candlelight. Sometimes, they are way off – you'd better take a taxi to catch them.

Bastards! After gate-crashing your funeral, they don't return your call.

When they finally ring a bell, you don't know where to place them. They have network problems. They are synthetic. They don't stand the cold. Even in the silt season, they don't yield much.

Be careful with metaphors.

Whatever they give you with one hand, they take back with another.

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### **Pollen Fever**

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Contrary to what they believed, I was never allergic to skins. Or sunrays. I wasn't a cadre.

\*\*

Arrested by three. Tortured by five. Fornication. For negligence. For negation. Wasn't that a question over syzygy? Or posture? He had even pawned his pearls to pose with my wax figure. I sneezed profusely in their hands.

\*\*\*

First they spoke a language that embraced you like a failed state. Then they switched.

Like a passage from winter to summer, the transition was ungovernable, and violent.

\*\*\*\*

Damn you all! Indecent infixes, triple consonants and doted vowels!

Like Mi Aye, I've had it twice.

Once for being too yellow.

Once for being too white.

\*\*\*\*\*

Even after they'd renamed pollen fever hay fever, I insisted watchful trees mustn't bloom. Rain may settle dust, but leave us with wet pyres. For padauk, however, drizzles are never good enough.

- "Metaphors" & "Pollen Fever" [*Griffith Review*, Edition 49: New Asia Now]

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### Let us suppose you love me

§ Leaves and twigs on the ground

Do I have to know the name of that tall tree to freefall from her canopy? In my language there are 1,500 synonyms for penis, and only 528 different ways to describe vagina. Does it say anything about my phobia?

§ Let me break it down again

Shall I collapse into a relapse? I am a bambino taking his first baby steps. White lotus blooms from the earth just to embrace each of my footfalls.

Off-balance, I keep smiling to myself. This moment, I am gold. Next moment, I am silver. Before bedtime every day, I take a pill that dissolves only in my liver.

§ Cane, in fact, is a little brother of bamboo

In the Liberated Area, I lived on bamboo shoots in a bamboo hut. I carried a bamboo rifle. The Thais say the weapons of choice of the royal Burmese infantry that ransacked Siam in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were solid bamboo clubs and bamboo spears. I have seen throats cut with a bamboo strip on the China border.

At school I was caned by language teachers. At home I was caned by father. In the Liberated Area, they stripped me naked, they crammed me in a bamboo coop and, with a tiny wet cane, they caned the most sensual parts of my body day in day out until I named all the 1,500 synonyms for penis. Rebooting never cleanses my system of bamboophobia. A famine is imminent whenever bamboos flower.

§ They call it fuck because all other four-letter words were taken

Life's trappings are deeper than the Pacific Ocean's Mariana trench. A German lover who once proposed to me said the only reason she wanted to get married was to get herself a new family name. Her family name translates Taxcollector. Recently she has become Frau Wagner, a Mrs. Wagondriver.

§ I recommend you walk around in Rangoon's diagonal rain

That'll correct your neck pain. If you climb, you can climb to the canopy. If you dive, you'd better dive to the sand and avoid hitting rock bottom. If you are into diving - as opposed

to climbing which most of us do since our ancestors have left the ocean, Hla Than has warned, 'Never take the earth for granted. I have come to understand art after having sex with a transsexual who is more woman than a woman.'

- "Let us suppose you love me" [*World Literature Today*, September 2013]

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### **Gust**

She never wanted to be Queen Regnant. Let alone politics, she wasn't even into hopscotch. She was just fond of flicking custard apple seeds into a hole in the ground. What happened was this. She'd hung her sarong out to dry on a gusty day. When the wind started licking her sarong, she ran out to get it but it was too late. Soon the whole Kingdom of Ava saw the sarong, blown off by the gale, entangled at the top palace spire, flapping like a royal banner. "Owing to your Majesty's Eminent Prowess, the owner of this sarong must be extraordinarily blessed. She must be made your Majesty's Queen Consort." Me Nu was just a girl going through puberty when she was crowned Queen Consort by the Big Uncle King. After Lower Burma was annexed to British India, the Prince of Thayawaddi, a brother of Big Uncle, overthrew the King. No royal blood must be shed. The Royal Executioners of Ava drowned the nineteen-year-old Queen Consort in the Irrawaddy.

Attention, gals! Weather forecasts say it's going to be gusty today. If you are not into power or money, hurry and remove your undies and sarongs from the clotheslines outdoors!

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### **Copter**

for Han Lynn

Those who were born with an exile star will experience a flight or two. To have a taste of copter, you've gotta be super lucky. Copter doesn't need take-off speed. It doesn't need wheels and runway. Vertical ascension. It means vertical landing!

On an airplane, you are subject to air stewardesses' whim. There is no such thing as copter stewardess. If there's a stewardess on a copter, she is all yours. Copter passengers don't have to go through check-in or security. They don't have to carry with them passport or boarding pass.

Copter passengers are light travelers. There's only one class on Copter – business. You don't need to line up to board Copter. On Copter, you are not subject to lectures about the benefits of buckling up or keeping your back straight throughout the travel.

If the airport is far, or when there's a traffic jam on the way to the airport, you will be wasting your time travelling towards the airplane, rather than spending your time enjoying the flight. With or without you, an airplane is set for a destination.

Airplane is public toilet on wings. Copter is for the exceptionally talented.

Just lay back and relax.

There'll be an airlift on your roof.

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### **I ain't fleeing nowhere**

Sorry, but I am busy. I am working on a new project. A prototype man-fish, swim-talk, to be installed in a thank-tink. The type that eats sultriness.

Are you in a hurry? Go ahead.

Your river is silted. Your beach needs nourishment. Your reef gold must be sifted. Your paradigm, shifted. Mercury you no longer use. You simply get mercurial.

I will catch up with you later. I really mean real.

I will play the invisible theremin. I will finger the thin air.

I will meditate, until I levitate. I will eyeball the void, until the void blinks and blushes.

I will shadow Jan Hendrik Leopold,

I will sit very very still, and travel.

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## Chairs

§ The only chair they had in antiquity was the throne, the most uncomfortable stool, the jewel-studded unmovable, the gentlest four-legged in history.

§ All cars are chairs on wheels, but not all wheelchairs are cars. An average chair can tell you that charity always begins with a chair. Radical chairs kill and get killed fighting for charism. Romantic chairs think they are cherries. Academic chairs make their living trying to prove the correlation between characins and chairs.

§ The most boorish chairs are bureaucratic leather chairs and restless revolving chairs. The mass-produced ubiquitous type. They love to roll with business jackets hung over their back.

§ Law of Chair

- Every chair wants to sit at the top of the table.
- Every chair wants to be a throne.
- Every chair aspires to be at the highest place in the chapel.
- Every chair prays to become the seat of god, the cathedral.

§ It's offensive to offer 'a seat' to a visiting chair. No chair wants to be addressed as a seat — a seat is just any place for your buttocks.

§ Invisible air chairs are not made of air; they are of transparent plastic. The air that you must breathe does not have the chair quality to support your ass. Invisible chairs are very proud of this piece of information.

§ Suicide by hanging is accomplished when a chair under your feet is kicked off. No chair, however, will acknowledge that no monarch, has ever hanged himself by kicking off his throne, the chair of all chairs.

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## Funeral of an elephant

How many men does it take to shoulder the casket of an elephant? How many teak planks needed to make an elephantine coffin? How many wood craftsmen? How many gallons of paint and polish? How many tons of tall nails with textured heads?

Will they attach two pairs of gigantic trousers to the humongous coffin to make room for the elephant's legs, and three holes in the front for the trunk and the tusks? Should the casket be draped in Indonesian batik or a national flag? Eloquent eulogies have been penned. Top florists have been commissioned to come forward with fancy sympathy flowers and designer wreaths.

Perhaps an elephant is heavier dead? When an elephant dies, everybody gets on edge. Even the ivory poachers have sent their condolences. Security is all-time tight. The rumor mill in overdrive – radicals will hijack the casket and turn the funeral into a protest. All the tribal leaders will be there. They will need six deck cranes to lower the bulky box into the grave the

size of Lesotho. 21-gun salute for such a mammoth may be too low-key, too ungenerous.

Of course the embalmers want the elephant embalmed.  
'Keep it in a mausoleum. It's good for tourism.' they insist.

Lucky us, the funeral director says the elephant must rest.  
'After all it wasn't a white elephant.'

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### **The romanticism purist**

He was conceived the moment the idea for the book, 'Joys and Sorrows of Work,' hit his spermy parents. On the morning of his birth, a series of auspicious dillies were observed - a toddy palm in the neighbourhood was struck down by lightening, crows were crowing, the cooking oil price went down inexplicably.

And the book? A rival published it first and went on to claim the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics. His own business scheme - to can the luxury of back-floating while smoking a Havana on the Black Sea, never took off. It is above the New Investment Law.

With his eyes trained on prospective bidders, he swears he won't sell out no matter. As he has far too often played monkey in pity of monkey handlers who beg for rice in the name of monkey welfare, he is now in the habit of feeling his rear end to see if a tail sprout is already there.

On one cheek, he acts like Angelina who's had it twice and, grieves beyond solace. On the other, he acts like Brad who never gets it enough. In his PhD dissertation titled, 'The Four Forms of Graft', he's arrived at this conclusion; the Almighty Chaos' butt drool is as shitty as the lesser Apollo's.

He may be as hardy as a baseball bat that can bust through your clay pot with no effort. Yet he turns tender once he hears your tears rolling. He plans to fly around the globe one day to personally apologize to each of those whose life he ruined.

He would do that in a typical Buddhist way - kowtowing with coconut-in-the-hands-of-bananas offering. The future is robust, for robots. He will retire after you vote him in for the twentieth consecutive term.

- *The Postscript Journal*, Spring 2013

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**Upper black lining**

They say *tanuang* provides a cosy shade in the summer. Tamarind, a warm shelter for the winter.

The stilt house we are in is planked with timber from the hardwood trees that used to compete in tallness in their effort to get better exposure to the sun in the jungle. Termites are everywhere on the dense ground. I cook her rice with grains that used to weigh down the whole paddy field. That field is an industrial zone now.

A scribble on the Sagaing clay pot that rests on a wooden tripod in the corner of the room reads PER ION. Should it read PERFECTION, the supreme quality of the Lord Buddha? Details aren't important. The scribble in lime must have been the work of a tenant past.

What's important is what remains in the future.

She weeps. I will have to toe off the poem stuck in her throat. Teardrops big and small will be replaced with neologisms. The hem of her sarong I cling on for life has no upper black lining at the waistline.

Sarongs, with no upper black lining, are good for all seasons.

If she will ever write a breakup letter, I request she write in Burmese. Mother tongue hurts best.

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**What really happened to me at Laizastrasse**

- Mykonos, the Greek restaurant at the corner, where I got a shot on the house, shut down.
- I earned my limits. Or, did I?
- I learned how to brew espresso without a machine. It worked a dream!
- A Burma-born poet visited me. He got me wrong. On both counts. It was *Laizastrasse*, not *Leiserstrasse*. My number wasn't tango, tango, stereo, mirror, black, copper, yoko, tango, bread. It was tango, tango, stereo, mirror, black, copper, yoko, tango, bread, butter. No lift to my flat. Sorry.
- Earth filled her lap with sorrows of her own.
- I met a woman Genghis Khan. She read everything in Russian. I sold her to Gagarin.
- Some loft beds could be too lofty. Someone got turned off on the way up.
- Horror. In the month of September. The bananas I'd been eating every morning over the years were conflict-soiled.
- I lost V, the glove for my left. V was thirteen-winter old. On the way to look for her, I lost her identical twin, O, the glove for my right. O was only a couple of weeks old.
- The voice spoke to me, 'Accept Him as your Lord and Saviour. Instead of dying gradually you will move from glory to glory.'
- Professor Risotto, my neighbour's cat, died. What's her name? My neighbour's?

- *Literary Freud* I borrowed from the Library of Fine Arts but never read went missing. Fortnight. Overdue. I found it later inside *Macbeth: Psychological Shakespeare*.
- I was ready to be old.
- I wasn't.

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## **Final Report by The Supreme People's Emergency Inquiry Commission (Classified)**

### **1. Introduction**

The Supreme People's Emergency Inquiry Commission (SPEIC), a team of twenty-four experts and concerned notabilities, was formed three years ago following the motion to form the SPEIC was tabled, deliberated and approved in the Session 3 of The Supreme People's Assembly (SPA).

### **2. Objective**

To investigate the causes of ongoing unrests in The Democratic Supreme People's Republic of Dukkha.

### **3. Principles**

- 3a. Long-run development of The Democratic Supreme People's Republic of Dukkha
- 3b. Long-run benefit of her Supreme Citizens, i.e., the 135 national races and other thoroughbreds according to the Supreme People's Constitution and the Supreme State's existing Laws
- 3c. An optimally optimistic outlook for the long run

### **4. Methodology**

Random sampling.

Note: In the field, 'random sampling' turned out to be unpractical as our researchers were not able to distinguish between the Randomers and the Redeemers. It was dropped and replaced with 'accidental sampling.'

Sample question. Please tick the relevant box.

Are you with us?

YES       YES, SIR!

**5. Findings**

- 5a. Almost all civil unrests have their origin in communal brawls.
- 5b. All the victims who have succumbed to death suffered from fatal blows.
- 5c. The rage of the dispossessed has its roots in their dispossessedness.
- 5d. The laboratory test result of the water samples provided by the villagers from Copper Hill region confirms that the water from the avici wells in the area looks like urine, smells like urine and tastes like urine.
- 5e. Hillbillies do not want their hills to be destroyed.
- 5f. Population is a tragedy of the common.
- 5.g. During the supreme rule of Supreme Peace and Development Council that preceded the democratically elected government of the Democratic Supreme People's Republic of Dukkha, sulphuric acid was widely used.

**6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

- 6.a The lack of transparency is the root cause of the problem.
- 6.b It is highly recommended that transparency be upgraded with international aid immediately.

The Supreme People's Emergency Inquiry Commission  
The Democratic Supreme People's Republic of Dukkha

[*Bengal Lights*, Autumn 2013]

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