

## Module 2: Speeches and Testimonies

### Module 2

# Speeches and Testimonies

## **ART, TRUTH & POLITICS**

### **Harold Pinter**

#### **Introduction:**

Harold Pinter (1930-2008) is a Nobel Prize-winning English playwright, screenwriter, director and actor. One of the most influential modern British dramatists, his writing career spanned more than 50 years. His best-known plays include *The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Homecoming* (1964), and *Betrayal* (1978), each of which he adapted for the screen. His screenplay adaptations of others' works include *The Servant* (1963), *The Go-Between* (1971), *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), *The Trial* (1993), and *Sleuth* (2007). He also directed and acted in radio, stage, television, and film productions of his own and others' works.

Pinter was born and raised in Hackney, east London, and educated at Hackney Downs School. He was a keen cricket player, acted in school plays and wrote poetry. He attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art but did not complete the course. Subsequently, he continued training at the Central School of Speech and Drama and worked in repertory theatre in Ireland and England. In 1956 he married

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actress Vivien Merchant and had a son, Daniel, born in 1958. He left Merchant in 1975 and married author Lady Antonia Fraser in 1980.

Pinter's career as a playwright began with a production of *The Room* in 1957. His second play, *The Birthday Party*, closed after eight performances, but was enthusiastically reviewed by critic Harold Hobson. He appeared as an actor in productions of his own work on radio and film. He also undertook a number of roles in works by other writers. He directed nearly 50 productions for stage, theatre and screen. Pinter received over 50 awards, prizes, and other honours, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005 and the French Légion d'honneur in 2007. Despite frail health after being diagnosed with cancer in December 2001, Pinter continued to act on stage and screen, last performing the title role of Samuel Beckett's one-act monologue *Krapp's Last Tape*, for the 50th anniversary season of the Royal Court Theatre, in October 2006. He died from liver cancer on 24 December 2008.

"Art, Truth and Politics" is the Nobel Lecture delivered by Harold Pinter. Since he was ill and admitted in hospital, he videotaped his Nobel Lecture, and it was projected on three large screens at the Swedish Academy on the evening of 7 December 2005. Pinter delivered a passionate, truthful and courageous acceptance speech. Pinter's lecture has been widely distributed by print and online media and has provoked much commentary and debate, with some commentators accusing Pinter of "anti-Americanism". In his Nobel Lecture, Pinter criticises

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the policies and practices of American administrations. Pinter has spoken out tirelessly and powerfully against the war in Iraq and the depredations of American imperialism in the Balkans, Central America and elsewhere that preceded it. He utilized his acceptance speech to extend and develop that struggle, giving a blistering critique of the entire course of US foreign policy in the period since World War II, and indicting Britain for its role as Washington's junior partner and accomplice. Mincing no words, Pinter called Bush and Blair war criminals, and made an impassioned call for mass political resistance to militarism and war. Here is an edited version of the Nobel lecture which focuses on Pinter's passionate concern for the victims of oppression.

#### **Text:**

#### **Art, Truth and Politics**

In 1958 I wrote the following:

'There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.'

I believe that these assertions still make sense and do still apply to the exploration of reality through art. So as a writer I stand by them but as a citizen I cannot. As a citizen I must ask: What is true? What is false?

Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive. The search is clearly what drives the endeavour. The search is your task. More often than not you stumble upon the

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truth in the dark, colliding with it or just glimpsing an image or a shape which seems to correspond to the truth, often without realising that you have done so. But the real truth is that there never is any such thing as one truth to be found in dramatic art. There are many. These truths challenge each other, recoil from each other, reflect each other, ignore each other, tease each other, are blind to each other. Sometimes you feel you have the truth of a moment in your hand, then it slips through your fingers and is lost...

So language in art remains a highly ambiguous transaction, a quicksand, a trampoline, a frozen pool which might give way under you, the author, at any time.

But as I have said, the search for the truth can never stop. It cannot be adjourned, it cannot be postponed. It has to be faced, right there, on the spot.

Political theatre presents an entirely different set of problems. Sermonising has to be avoided at all cost. Objectivity is essential. The characters must be allowed to breathe their own air. The author cannot confine and constrict them to satisfy his own taste or disposition or prejudice. He must be prepared to approach them from a variety of angles, from a full and uninhibited range of perspectives, take them by surprise, perhaps, occasionally, but nevertheless give them the freedom to go which way they will. This does not always work. And political satire, of course, adheres to none of these precepts, in fact does precisely the opposite, which is its proper function...

As every single person here knows, the

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justification for the invasion of Iraq was that Saddam Hussein possessed a highly dangerous body of weapons of mass destruction, some of which could be fired in 45 minutes, bringing about appalling devastation. We were assured that was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq had a relationship with Al Quaeda and shared responsibility for the atrocity in New York of September 11th 2001. We were assured that this was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq threatened the security of the world. We were assured it was true. It was not true.

The truth is something entirely different. The truth is to do with how the United States understands its role in the world and how it chooses to embody it.

But before I come back to the present I would like to look at the recent past, by which I mean United States foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. I believe it is obligatory upon us to subject this period to at least some kind of even limited scrutiny, which is all that time will allow here.

Everyone knows what happened in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe during the post-war period: the systematic brutality, the widespread atrocities, the ruthless suppression of independent thought. All this has been fully documented and verified.

But my contention here is that the US crimes in the same period have only been superficially recorded, let alone documented, let alone acknowledged, let alone recognised as crimes at all. I believe this must be addressed and that the truth has considerable bearing

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on where the world stands now. Although constrained, to a certain extent, by the existence of the Soviet Union, the United States' actions throughout the world made it clear that it had concluded it had carte blanche to do what it liked.

Direct invasion of a sovereign state has never in fact been America's favoured method. In the main, it has preferred what it has described as 'low intensity conflict'. Low intensity conflict means that thousands of people die but slower than if you dropped a bomb on them in one fell swoop. It means that you infect the heart of the country, that you establish a malignant growth and watch the gangrene bloom. When the populace has been subdued – or beaten to death – the same thing – and your own friends, the military and the great corporations, sit comfortably in power, you go before the camera and say that democracy has prevailed. This was a commonplace in US foreign policy in the years to which I refer.

The tragedy of Nicaragua was a highly significant case. I choose to offer it here as a potent example of America's view of its role in the world, both then and now.

I was present at a meeting at the US embassy in London in the late 1980s.

The United States Congress was about to decide whether to give more money to the Contras in their campaign against the state of Nicaragua. I was a member of a delegation speaking on behalf of Nicaragua but the most important member of this delegation was a Father John Metcalf. The leader of

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the US body was Raymond Seitz (then number two to the ambassador, later ambassador himself). Father Metcalf said: 'Sir, I am in charge of a parish in the north of Nicaragua. My parishioners built a school, a health centre, a cultural centre. We have lived in peace. A few months ago a Contra force attacked the parish. They destroyed everything: the school, the health centre, the cultural centre. They raped nurses and teachers, slaughtered doctors, in the most brutal manner. They behaved like savages. Please demand that the US government withdraw its support from this shocking terrorist activity.'

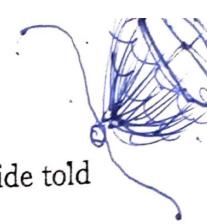
Raymond Seitz had a very good reputation as a rational, responsible and highly sophisticated man. He was greatly respected in diplomatic circles. He listened, paused and then spoke with some gravity. 'Father,' he said, 'let me tell you something. In war, innocent people always suffer.' There was a frozen silence. We stared at him. He did not flinch.

Innocent people, indeed, always suffer.

Finally somebody said: 'But in this case "innocent people" were the victims of a gruesome atrocity subsidised by your government, one among many. If Congress allows the Contras more money further atrocities of this kind will take place. Is this not the case? Is your government not therefore guilty of supporting acts of murder and destruction upon the citizens of a sovereign state?'

Seitz was imperturbable. 'I don't agree that the facts as presented support your assertions,' he said.

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As we were leaving the Embassy a US aide told me that he enjoyed my plays. I did not reply.

I should remind you that at the time President Reagan made the following statement: 'The Contras are the moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers.'

The United States supported the brutal Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua for over 40 years. The Nicaraguan people, led by the Sandinistas, overthrew this regime in 1979, a breathtaking popular revolution.

The Sandinistas weren't perfect. They possessed their fair share of arrogance and their political philosophy contained a number of contradictory elements. But they were intelligent, rational and civilised. They set out to establish a stable, decent, pluralistic society. The death penalty was abolished. Hundreds of thousands of poverty-stricken peasants were brought back from the dead. Over 100,000 families were given title to land. Two thousand schools were built. A quite remarkable literacy campaign reduced illiteracy in the country to less than one seventh. Free education was established and a free health service. Infant mortality was reduced by a third. Polio was eradicated...

The United States finally brought down the Sandinista government. It took some years and considerable resistance but relentless economic persecution and 30,000 dead finally undermined the spirit of the Nicaraguan people. They were exhausted and poverty stricken once again. The casinos moved back into the country. Free health and free education were over. Big business returned with a vengeance.

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'Democracy' had prevailed.

But this 'policy' was by no means restricted to Central America. It was conducted throughout the world. It was never-ending. And it is as if it never happened.

The United States supported and in many cases engendered every right wing military dictatorship in the world after the end of the Second World War. I refer to Indonesia, Greece, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Haiti, Turkey, the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador, and, of course, Chile. The horror the United States inflicted upon Chile in 1973 can never be purged and can never be forgiven.

Hundreds of thousands of deaths took place throughout these countries. Did they take place? And are they in all cases attributable to US foreign policy? The answer is yes they did take place and they are attributable to American foreign policy. But you wouldn't know it.

It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter. It was of no interest. The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people have actually talked about them. You have to hand it to America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good. It's a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis...

What has happened to our moral sensibility? Did

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we ever have any? What do these words mean? Do they refer to a term very rarely employed these days – conscience? A conscience to do not only with our own acts but to do with our shared responsibility in the acts of others? Is all this dead? Look at Guantanamo Bay. Hundreds of people detained without charge for over three years, with no legal representation or due process, technically detained forever. This totally illegitimate structure is maintained in defiance of the Geneva Convention. It is not only tolerated but hardly thought about by what's called the 'international community'. This criminal outrage is being committed by a country, which declares itself to be 'the leader of the free world'. Do we think about the inhabitants of Guantanamo Bay? What does the media say about them? They pop up occasionally – a small item on page six. They have been consigned to a no man's land from which indeed they may never return. At present many are on hunger strike, being force-fed, including British residents. No niceties in these force-feeding procedures. No sedative or anaesthetic. Just a tube stuck up your nose and into your throat. You vomit blood. This is torture. What has the British Foreign Secretary said about this? Nothing. What has the British Prime Minister said about this? Nothing. Why not? Because the United States has said: to criticise our conduct in Guantanamo Bay constitutes an unfriendly act. You're either with us or against us. So Blair shuts up. The invasion of Iraq was a bandit act, an act of blatant state terrorism, demonstrating absolute contempt for the concept of international law. The invasion was an arbitrary military action inspired

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by a series of lies upon lies and gross manipulation of the media and therefore of the public; an act intended to consolidate American military and economic control of the Middle East masquerading – as a last resort, all other justifications having failed to justify themselves – as liberation. A formidable assertion of military force responsible for the death and mutilation of thousands and thousands of innocent people.

We have brought torture, cluster bombs, depleted uranium, innumerable acts of random murder, misery, degradation and death to the Iraqi people and call it bringing freedom and democracy to the Middle East.

How many people do you have to kill before you qualify to be described as a mass murderer and a war criminal? One hundred thousand? More than enough, I would have thought. Therefore it is just that Bush and Blair be arraigned before the International Criminal Court of Justice. But Bush has been clever. He has not ratified the International Criminal Court of Justice. Therefore if any American soldier or for that matter politician finds himself in the dock Bush has warned that he will send in the marines. But Tony Blair has ratified the Court and is therefore available for prosecution. We can let the Court have his address if they're interested. It is Number 10, Downing Street, London.

Death in this context is irrelevant. Both Bush and Blair place death well away on the back burner. At least 100,000 Iraqis were killed by American bombs and missiles before the Iraq insurgency began. These people are of no moment. Their deaths don't exist.

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They are blank. They are not even recorded as being dead. 'We don't do body counts,' said the American general Tommy Franks.

Early in the invasion there was a photograph published on the front page of British newspapers of Tony Blair kissing the cheek of a little Iraqi boy. 'A grateful child,' said the caption. A few days later there was a story and photograph, on an inside page, of another four-year-old boy with no arms. His family had been blown up by a missile. He was the only survivor. 'When do I get my arms back?' he asked. The story was dropped. Well, Tony Blair wasn't holding him in his arms, nor the body of any other mutilated child, nor the body of any bloody corpse. Blood is dirty. It dirties your shirt and tie when you're making a sincere speech on television.

The 2,000 American dead are an embarrassment. They are transported to their graves in the dark. Funerals are unobtrusive, out of harm's way. The mutilated rot in their beds, some for the rest of their lives. So the dead and the mutilated both rot, in different kinds of graves...

The United States now occupies 702 military installations throughout the world in 132 countries, with the honourable exception of Sweden, of course. We don't quite know how they got there but they are there all right. The United States possesses 8,000 active and operational nuclear warheads. Two thousand are on hair trigger alert, ready to be launched with 15 minutes warning. It is developing new systems of nuclear force, known as bunker busters. The British,

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ever cooperative, are intending to replace their own nuclear missile, Trident. Who, I wonder, are they aiming at? Osama bin Laden? You? Me? Joe Doakes? China? Paris? Who knows? What we do know is that this infantile insanity – the possession and threatened use of nuclear weapons – is at the heart of present American political philosophy. We must remind ourselves that the United States is on a permanent military footing and shows no sign of relaxing it.

Many thousands, if not millions, of people in the United States itself are demonstrably sickened, shamed and angered by their government's actions, but as things stand they are not a coherent political force – yet. But the anxiety, uncertainty and fear which we can see growing daily in the United States is unlikely to diminish.

I know that President Bush has many extremely competent speech writers but I would like to volunteer for the job myself. I propose the following short address which he can make on television to the nation. I see him grave, hair carefully combed, serious, winning, sincere, often beguiling, sometimes employing a wry smile, curiously attractive, a man's man.

'God is good. God is great. God is good. My God is good. Bin Laden's God is bad. His is a bad God. Saddam's God was bad, except he didn't have one. He was a barbarian. We are not barbarians. We don't chop people's heads off. We believe in freedom. So does God. I am not a barbarian. I am the democratically elected leader of a freedom loving democracy. We are a compassionate society. We give compassionate

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electrocution and compassionate lethal injection. We are a great nation. I am not a 11 dictator. He is. I am not a barbarian. He is. And he is. They all are. I possess moral authority. You see this fist? This is my moral authority. And don't you forget it.'

A writer's life is a highly vulnerable, almost naked activity. We don't have to weep about that. The writer makes his choice and is stuck with it. But it is true to say that you are open to all the winds, some of them icy indeed. You are out on your own, out on a limb. You find no shelter, no protection – unless you lie – in which case of course you have constructed your own protection and, it could be argued, become a politician...

I believe that despite the enormous odds which exist, unflinching, unswerving, fierce intellectual determination, as citizens, to define the real truth of our lives and our societies is a crucial obligation which devolves upon us all. It is in fact mandatory.

If such a determination is not embodied in our political vision we have no hope of restoring what is so nearly lost to us – the dignity of man.

### **Glossary:**

elusive: difficult to find, catch, or achieve

endeavour: an attempt to achieve a goal

stumble: momentarily lose one's balance

trampoline: a strong fabric sheet connected by springs to a frame used for gymnastic exercises.

appalling: causing shock or dismay.

devastation: great destruction or damage

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obligatory: compulsory

contention: heated disagreement

carte blanche: complete freedom to act as one wishes

malignant: evil in nature, malicious

gangrene: localized death and decomposition of body tissue resulting from obstructed circulation or bacterial infection

Contras: a member of a guerrilla force in Nicaragua which opposed the left wing Sandinista government and was supported by the US for much of that time.

flinch: make a quick nervous movement of the face or body as an instinctive reaction to fear or pain

imperturbable: calm, composed

Sandinistas: a member of the left-wing Nicaraguan political organization, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), which came to power in 1979 after overthrowing the dictator Anastasio Somoza. Opposed during most of their period of rule by the US-backed Contras, the Sandinistas were voted out of office in 1990.

masquerading: be disguised

Joe Dokes: Joe Mc Doakes, a fictional character, is the protagonist of a series of 63 black and white live action comedy released between 1942 and 1956. The character's name comes from a popular American slang term for the average man.

infantile: childish

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### **Exercises:**

I. Answer the following questions in one word or a phrase:

1. Harold Pinter received Nobel Prize in the year ——————. *[Handwritten: 2001]*

2. According to Pinter, —————— has to be avoided at all cost in political theatre.

1. The leader of the US body at the meeting in London was ——————.

II. Answer the following questions in one or two sentences:

1. Why does Pinter say that truth in drama is forever elusive?

2. What was the justification for the invasion of Iraq?

3. What do you mean by 'low intensity conflict'?

4. Who were the Sandinistas?

III. Answer the following questions in a paragraph:

1. Pinter's criticism of the American foreign policy in Nicaragua.

2. Pinter's anti-Americanism.

IV. Attempt an essay on the following questions:

1. How does Pinter criticise the policies and practices of American administration?

2. How does Harold Pinter express his passionate concern for the victims of oppression in his Nobel Lecture 'Art, Truth and Politics'?

### **Activity:**

Make a note on the US foreign policy of Donald Trump.

## FINAL SPEECH IN THE MOVIE “THE GREAT DICTATOR”

Charlie Chaplin

### Introduction:

Sir Charles Spencer Chaplin (1889 – 1977) was an English comic actor, filmmaker and composer who rose to fame in the era of silent film. Chaplin became a worldwide icon through his screen persona *The Tramp* and is considered one of the most important figures in the history of the film industry. His career spanned more than 75 years, from childhood in the Victorian era until a year before his death in 1977.

Chaplin wrote, directed, produced, edited, starred in, and composed the music for most of his films. He was a perfectionist, and his financial independence enabled him to spend years on the development and production of a picture. His films are characterised by slapstick combined with pathos, typified in the Tramp's struggles against adversity. Many contain social and political themes, as well as autobiographical elements. In 1972, as part of a renewed appreciation for his work, Chaplin received an Honorary Academy Award. He continues to be held in high regard, with "The Gold Rush", "City Lights", "Modern Times", and "The Great Dictator" often ranked on industry lists of the greatest films of all times.

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Chaplin received many awards and honours, especially later in life. In the 1975 New Year Honours, he was appointed a Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. He was also awarded honorary Doctor of Letters degree by the University of Oxford and the University of Durham in 1962. In 1965, he and Ingmar Bergman were joint winners of the Erasmus Prize and, in 1971, he was appointed a Commander of the National Order of the Legion of Honour by the French government. From the film industry, Chaplin received a special Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 1972, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Lincoln Center Film Society the same year. The latter has since been presented annually to filmmakers as The Chaplin Award. Chaplin was given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1972, having been previously excluded because of his political beliefs.

Chaplin received three Academy Awards: an Honorary Award for "versatility and genius in acting, writing, directing, and producing 'The Circus'" in 1929, a second Honorary Award for "the incalculable effect he has had in making motion pictures the art form of this century" in 1972, and a Best Score award in 1973 for *Limelight* (shared with Ray Rasch and Larry Russell). He was further nominated in the Best Actor, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Picture (as producer) categories for "The Great Dictator", and received another Best Original Screenplay nomination for *Monsieur Verdoux*. In 1976, Chaplin was made a Fellow of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA).

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Six of Chaplin's films have been selected for preservation in the National Film Registry by the United States Library of Congress: "The Immigrant" (1917), "The Kid" (1921), "The Gold Rush" (1925), "City Lights" (1931), "Modern Times" (1936), and "The Great Dictator" (1940).

"The Great Dictator" is a 1940 American political satire comedy-drama film written, directed, produced, scored by and starring British comedian Charlie Chaplin. "The Great Dictator" was a political satire, condemning Hitler, Mussolini, the Nazis, and anti-Semitism. It was Chaplin's first full-sound production and was nominated for five Academy Awards. The film tells the story of a Jewish barber (Chaplin) who is mistaken for a dictator he resembles and is asked to take his place. At the film's conclusion, he rejects his position as emperor and gives an impassioned speech that has become one of the most famous in film history. Charlie Chaplin's speech at the end of "The Great Dictator" provides an excellent road map of how a citizen can conquer the issues that divide him and how a selfless leader views the world.

### **Text:**

#### **Final speech in the movie "The Great Dictator"**

I'm sorry, but I don't want to be an emperor. That's not my business. I don't want to rule or conquer anyone. I should like to help everyone - if possible - one another. Human beings are like that. We want to

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live by each other's happiness - not by each other's misery. We don't want to hate and despise one another. In this world there is room for everyone. And the good earth is rich and can provide for everyone. The way of life can be free and beautiful, but we have lost the way.

Greed has poisoned men's souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed. We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical. Our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery we need humanity. More than cleverness we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and all will be lost....

The aeroplane and the radio have brought us closer together. The very nature of these inventions cries out for the goodness in men - cries out for universal brotherhood - for the unity of us all. Even now my voice is reaching millions throughout the world - millions of despairing men, women, and little children - victims of a system that makes men torture and imprison innocent people.

To those who can hear me, I say - do not despair. The misery that is now upon us is but the passing of greed - the bitterness of men who fear the way of human progress. The hate of men will pass, and dictators die, and the power they took from the people will return to the people. And so long as men die, liberty will never perish. ....

Soldiers! don't give yourselves to brutes - men

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who despise you - enslave you - who regiment your lives - tell you what to do - what to think and what to feel! Who drill you - diet you - treat you like cattle, use you as cannon fodder. Don't give yourselves to these unnatural men - machine men with machine minds and machine hearts! You are not machines! You are not cattle! You are men! You have the love of humanity in your hearts! You don't hate! Only the unloved hate - the unloved and the unnatural! Soldiers! Don't fight for slavery! Fight for liberty!

In the 17th Chapter of St Luke it is written: "the Kingdom of God is within man" - not one man nor a group of men, but in all men! In you! You, the people have the power - the power to create machines. The power to create happiness! You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure.

Then - in the name of democracy - let us use that power - let us all unite. Let us fight for a new world - a decent world that will give men a chance to work - that will give youth a future and old age a security. By the promise of these things, brutes have risen to power. But they lie! They do not fulfil that promise. They never will!

Dictators free themselves but they enslave the people! Now let us fight to fulfil that promise! Let us fight to free the world - to do away with national barriers - to do away with greed, with hate and intolerance. Let us fight for a world of reason, a world where science and progress will lead to all men's happiness. Soldiers! in the name of democracy, let us all unite!

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#### **Glossary:**

to barricade: to block or defend with a barrier

goose-step: a military marching step in which the legs are not bent at the knee.

cynical: distrustful of human sincerity or integrity

despise: feel contempt or dislike

cannon fodder: soldiers regarded merely as material to be expended in war

#### **Exercises:**

##### **I. Answer the following questions in one word:**

1. Charlie Chaplin plays the role of a Jewish barber in the film \_\_\_\_\_.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ has poisoned men's souls.
3. In the 17th Chapter of St. \_\_\_\_\_ it is written: "the Kingdom of God is within man".

##### **II. Answer the following questions in one or two sentences:**

1. What, according to Chaplin, are the qualities without which life will be violent?
2. Name the power that will unite the world.

##### **III. Answer the following questions in a paragraph:**

1. The power of Democracy according to Charlie Chaplin.
2. Dictatorship versus Democracy.

##### **IV. Attempt an essay on the following questions.**

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- 1. How does Charlie Chaplin criticise dictatorship in “The Great Dictator”?
- 2. Charlie Chaplin’s view of the New World in “The Great Dictator”.

### **Activity:**

- 1. Watch the movie “The Great Dictator” giving special emphasis to the final speech of Charlie Chaplin.
- 2. Take turns and enact Charlie Chaplin’s final speech in “The Great Dictator” in the class.

# A SOLITARY HUMAN VOICE: EXCERPT FROM VOICES FROM CHERNOBYL: THE ORAL HISTORY OF A NUCLEAR DISASTER

Svetlana Alexievich

## Introduction:

Svetlana Alexievich was born in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, in 1948 and has spent most of her life in the Soviet Union and present-day Belarus, with prolonged periods of exile in Western Europe. Starting out as a journalist, she developed her own nonfiction genre, which gathers a chorus of voices to describe a specific historical moment. Her works include *War's Unwomanly Face* (1985), *Last Witnesses* (1985), *Zinky Boys* (1990), *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster* (1997), and *Secondhand Time* (2013). She has won many international awards, including the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature “for her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time.”

On April 26, 1986, the worst nuclear reactor accident in history occurred in Chernobyl and contaminated as much as three quarters of Europe. *Voices from Chernobyl* is the first book to present personal accounts of the tragedy. Journalist

Svetlana Alexievich interviewed hundreds of people affected by the meltdown - from innocent citizens to fire fighters to those called in to clean up the disaster - and their stories reveal the fear, anger, and uncertainty with which they still live. Comprised of interviews in monologue form, *Voices from Chernobyl* is a crucially important work, unforgettable in its emotional power and honesty. The different perspectives of those Svetlana Alexievich listened to come through as heart-rending stories. One of the speakers concludes: "you can write the rest of this yourself, I don't want to talk anymore...". The author allows the words of those who lived, and many who still live, in the affected areas to tell their own story. It is a catalogue of trauma - of lives which were disturbed by events so cataclysmic that the effects rippled around the whole planet.

*Voices From Chernobyl* begins with a brief account of the effects on Byelorussia, where two million people live on contaminated land, but otherwise presents the human side of the tragedy. It is an oral history, offering firsthand accounts from those involved with or affected by the disaster. The longest piece is nearly twenty pages, but most are much shorter and there are some "choruses" with just a paragraph or two from each individual. This allows a broad range of voices to be heard - the wife of a first-response fireman who took several weeks to die from radiation poisoning, self-settlers who stayed behind or returned to the contaminated zone, Russian refugees from Tajikstan who preferred the risks of radiation to those of young men with guns, conscript soldiers sent in to forcibly evacuate people or to work

as liquidators ploughing under crops, trees, topsoil and houses, hunters employed to kill abandoned cats and dogs, helicopter pilots and unprotected men on foot who cleared the roof of the reactor after robots failed to work in the intense radiation, children with birth-defects, those who used contaminated food and equipment or recycled it onto the black market, scientists and health workers who tried to alert people to the risks of radiation, officials and bureaucrats who spoke out and those who toed the line.

*Voices From Chernobyl* is a powerful work which narrates the personal details of the stories and often touches on the broader themes. Some of the records are of the historians and philosophers themselves, but the more concrete accounts are often the most revealing. It is not only a unique exploration of the human effects of the widespread radioactive contamination, but also offers a view of the final years of the Soviet Union and of life in Byelorussia. So it is very much relevant and should certainly be read in the recent revival of enthusiasm for nuclear power.

*Voices From Chernobyl*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award, is a compilation of interviews with survivors of the nuclear reactor accident. The book begins and ends with the testimony of two widows; one the young wife of a Pripyat fire fighter who went at night to fight the blaze in his shirtsleeves, the other the wife of a "liquidator", one of the 600,000 men drafted in to bury the topsoil and shoot every animal in the zone. He is the last in his platoon to die. The selection made here is an edited version of an excerpt from *Voices from Chernobyl* by

### *Signatures*

Svetlana Alexievich, translated by Keith Gessen. It begins with the story of the young, pregnant wife of one of the first fire fighters, who responded to the fire at Reactor 4 of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and of his slow, untimely death. The voice recorded here is that of Lyudmilla Ignatenko, wife of the deceased fireman Vasily Ignatenko.

#### **Text:**

#### **A Solitary Human Voice**

Lyudmilla Ignatenko, Wife of deceased Fireman Vasily Ignatenko

We were newlyweds. We still walked around holding hands, even if we were just going to the store. I would say to him, "I love you." But I didn't know then how much. I had no idea . . . We lived in the dormitory of the fire station where he worked. I always knew what was happening—where he was, how he was.

One night I heard a noise. I looked out the window. He saw me. "Close the window and go back to sleep. There's a fire at the reactor. I'll be back soon."

I didn't see the explosion itself. Just the flames. Everything was radiant. The whole sky. A tall flame. And smoke. The heat was awful. And he still hadn't come back.

They went off just as they were, in their shirtsleeves. No one told them. They had been called for a fire, that was it.

Seven o'clock in the morning. At seven I was told

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he was in the hospital. I ran over there, but the police had already encircled it, and they weren't letting anyone through. Only ambulances. The policemen shouted: "The ambulances are radioactive, stay away!" I started looking for a friend, she was a doctor at that hospital. I grabbed her white coat when she came out of an ambulance. "Get me inside!" "I can't. He's bad. They all are." I held onto her. "Just to see him!" "All right," she said. "Come with me. Just for fifteen or twenty minutes."

I saw him. He was all swollen and puffed up. You could barely see his eyes.

"He needs milk. Lots of milk," my friend said. "They should drink at least three litres each."

"But he doesn't like milk."

"He'll drink it now."

Many of the doctors and nurses in that hospital, and especially the orderlies, would get sick themselves and die. But we didn't know that then.

At ten, the cameraman Shishenok died. He was the first.

I said to my husband, "Vasenka, what should I do?" "Get out of here! Go! You have our child." I was pregnant. But how could I leave him? He was saying to me: "Go! Leave! Save the baby." "First I need to bring you some milk, then we'll decide what to do." My friend Tanya Kibenok came running in—her husband was in the same room. Her father was with her, he had a car. We got in and drove to the nearest village. We bought a bunch of three-litre bottles, six,



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so there was enough for everyone. But they started throwing up terribly from the milk.

They kept passing out, they got put on IVs. The doctors kept telling them they'd been poisoned by gas, for some reason. No one said anything about radiation.

I couldn't get into the hospital that evening. There was a sea of people. I stood under his window, he came over and yelled something to me. It was so desperate! Someone in the crowd heard him—they were being taken to Moscow that night. All the wives got together in one group. We decided we'd go with them. "Let us go with our husbands! You have no right!" We punched and we clawed. The soldiers—there were already soldiers—they pushed us back. Then the doctor came out and said they were flying to Moscow, but we needed to bring them their clothing. The clothes they'd worn at the station had been burned. The buses had stopped running already and we ran across the city. We came running back with the bags, but the plane was already gone. They tricked us. So that we wouldn't be there yelling and crying.

Later in the day I started throwing up. I was six months pregnant, but I had to get to Moscow.

In Moscow we asked the first police officer we saw, Where did they put the Chernobyl firemen? And he told us, which was a surprise; everyone had scared us into thinking it was top secret. "Hospital number 6. At the Shchukinskaya stop."

It was a special hospital, for radiology, and you couldn't get in without a pass. I gave some money to

### *Signatures*

the woman at the door, and she said: "Go ahead." Then I had to ask someone else, beg. Finally I was sitting in the office of the head radiologist, Angelina Vasilyevna Guskova. Right away she asked: "Do you have kids?"

What should I tell her? I can see already I need to hide that I'm pregnant. They won't let me see him! It's good I'm thin, you can't really tell anything.

"Yes," I say.

"How many?"

I'm thinking, I need to tell her two. If it's just one, she won't let me in.

"A boy and a girl."

"So you don't need to have any more. All right, listen: His central nervous system is completely compromised, his skull is completely compromised."

Okay, I'm thinking, so he'll be a little fidgety.

"And listen: If you start crying, I'll kick you out right away. No hugging or kissing. Don't even get near him. You have half an hour."

But I knew already that I wasn't leaving. If I leave, then it'll be with him. I swore to myself!

I come in, they're sitting on the bed, playing cards and laughing. "Vasya!" they call out. He turns around: "Oh, well, now it's over! She's found me even here!" He looks so funny, he's got pyjamas on for a size 48, and he's a size 52. The sleeves are too short, the pants are too short. But his face isn't swollen anymore. They were given some sort of fluid.

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I say: "Where'd you run off to?" He wants to hug me. The doctor won't let him. "Sit, sit," she says. "No hugging in here."

We turned it into a joke somehow. And then everyone came over, from the other rooms too, everyone from Pripyat. There were twenty-eight of them on the plane.

I wanted to be with him alone, if only for a minute. The guys felt it, and each of them thought of some excuse, and they all went out into the hall. Then I hugged him and I kissed him. He moved away.

"Don't sit near me. Take a chair."

"That's just silliness," I said, waving it away.

The next day when I came, they were lying by themselves, each in his own room. They were banned from going in the hallway, from talking to each other. They knocked on the walls with their knuckles. Dash-dot, dash-dot. The doctors explained that everyone's body reacts differently to radiation, and what one person can handle, another can't. They even measured the radiation of the walls where they had them. To the right, the left, and the floor beneath. They moved out all the sick people from the floor below and the floor above. There was no one left in the place.

He started to change—every day I met a brand-new person. The burns started to come to the surface. In his mouth, on his tongue, his cheeks—at first there were little lesions, and then they grew. It came off in layers—as white film . . . the colour of his face . . . his body . . . blue . . . red . . . grey-brown. And it's all so

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very mine! It's impossible to describe! It's impossible to write down! Or even to get over. The only thing that saved me was that it happened so fast; there wasn't any time to think, there wasn't any time to cry.

Fourteen days. In fourteen days a person dies.

It was the ninth of May. He always used to say to me: "You have no idea how beautiful Moscow is! Especially on V-Day, when they set off the fireworks. I want you to see it."

I was sitting with him in the room, he opened his eyes.

"Is it day or night?"

"It's nine at night."

"Open the window! They're going to set off the fireworks!"

I opened the window. We were on the eighth floor, and the whole city was there before us! There was a bouquet of fire exploding in the air.

"Look at that!" I said.

"I told you I'd show you Moscow. And I told you I'd always give you flowers on holidays..."

I looked over, and he was getting three carnations from under his pillow. He had given the nurse money, and she had bought them.

I ran over and kissed him.

"My love! My only one!"

He started growling. "What did the doctors tell

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you? No hugging me. And no kissing!"

He got so bad that I couldn't leave him even for a second. He was calling me constantly: "Lusya, where are you? Lusenka!" He called and called. The other biochambers, where our boys were, were being tended to by soldiers because the orderlies on staff refused, they demanded protective clothing. The soldiers carried the sanitary vessels. They wiped the floors down, changed the bedding. They did everything. Where did they get those soldiers? We didn't ask. But he—he—every day I would hear: Dead. Dead. Tischura is dead. Titenok is dead. Dead.

He was producing stool twenty-five to thirty times a day. With blood and mucus. His skin started cracking on his arms and legs. He became covered with boils. When he turned his head, there'd be a clump of hair left on the pillow. I tried joking: "It's convenient, you don't need a comb." Soon they cut all their hair. I did it for him myself. I wanted to do everything for him myself. If it had been physically possible I would have stayed with him twenty-four hours a day. I couldn't spare a minute. [Long silence.]

There's a fragment of some conversation, I'm remembering it. Someone saying: "You have to understand: This is not your husband anymore, not a beloved person, but a radioactive object with a strong density of poisoning. You're not suicidal. Get a hold of yourself." And I was like someone who'd lost her mind: "But I love him! I love him!" He's sleeping, and I'm whispering: "I love you!" Walking in the hospital courtyard, "I love you." Carrying his sanitary tray,

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"I love you."

One night, everything was quiet. We were all alone. He looked at me very, very carefully and suddenly he said:

"I want to see our child so much. How is he?"

"What are we going to name him?"

"You'll decide that yourself."

"Why myself, when there's two of us?"

"In that case, if it's a boy, he should be Vasya, and if it's a girl, Natasha."

I was like a blind person. I couldn't even feel the little pounding underneath my heart. Even though I was six months in. I thought that my little one was inside me, that he was protected.

And then—the last thing. I remember it in flashes, all broken up. I was sitting on my little chair next to him at night. At eight I said: "Vasenka, I'm going to go for a little walk." He opened his eyes and closed them, letting me go. I had just walked to the hotel, gone up to my room, lain down on the floor—I couldn't lie on the bed; everything hurt too much—when the cleaning lady started knocking on the door. "Go! Run to him! He's calling for you like mad!"

Right away I called the nurse's post. "How is he?" "He died fifteen minutes ago." What? I was there all night. I was gone for three hours! I ran down the stairs. He was still in his biochamber, they hadn't taken him away yet. I didn't leave him anymore after that. I escorted him all the way to the cemetery. Although

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the thing I remember isn't the grave, it's the plastic bag. That bag.

At the morgue they said, "Want to see what we'll dress him in?" I did! They dressed him up in formal wear, with his service cap. They couldn't get shoes on him because his feet had swelled up. They had to cut up the formal wear, too, because they couldn't get it on him, there wasn't a whole body to put it on. The last two days in the hospital—pieces of his lungs, of his liver, were coming out of his mouth. He was choking on his internal organs. I'd wrap my hand in a bandage and put it in his mouth, take out all that stuff. It's impossible to talk about. It's impossible to write about. And even to live through. They couldn't get a single pair of shoes to fit him. They buried him barefoot.

Everyone came—his parents, my parents. They bought black handkerchiefs in Moscow. The Emergency Commission met with us. They told everyone the same thing: It's impossible for us to give you the bodies of your husbands, your sons, they are very radioactive and will be buried in a Moscow cemetery in a special way. In sealed zinc caskets, under cement tiles. And you need to sign this document here.

If anyone got indignant and wanted to take the coffin back home, they were told that the dead were now, you know, heroes, and that they no longer belonged to their families. They were heroes of the state. They belonged to the state.

Right away they bought us plane tickets back home. For the next day. At home I fell asleep. I walked into the place and just fell onto the bed. I slept for three

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days. An ambulance came. "No," said the doctor, "she'll wake up. It's just a terrible sleep."

I was twenty-three. Two months later I went back to Moscow. From the train station straight to the cemetery. To him! And at the cemetery I started going into labour. Just as I started talking to him—they called the ambulance. It was two weeks before I was due.

They showed her to me—a girl. "Natashenka," I called out. "Your father named you Natashenka." She looked healthy. Arms, legs. But she had cirrhosis of the liver. Her liver had twenty-eight roentgens. Congenital heart disease. Four hours later they told me she was dead. And again: "We won't give her to you." "What do you mean you won't give her to me? It's me who won't give her to you!"

[She is silent for a long time.]

In Kiev they gave me an apartment. It was in a large building where they put everyone from the atomic station. It's a big apartment, with two rooms, the kind Vasya and I had dreamed of.

[She stands up, goes over to the window.]

There are many of us here. A whole street. That's what it's called Chernobylskaya. These people worked at the station their whole lives. A lot of them still go there to work on a provisional basis, that's how they work there now, no one lives there anymore. They have bad diseases, they're invalids, but they don't leave their jobs, they're scared to even think of the reactor closing down. Who needs them now anywhere

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else? Often they die. In a minute. They just drop— someone will be walking, he falls, goes to sleep. He was carrying flowers for his nurse and his heart stopped. They die, but no one's really asked us. No one's asked what we've been through. What we saw. No one wants to hear about death. About what scares them.

But I was telling you about love. About my love...

### **Glossary:**

puffed up: swollen and out of breath

knuckles: a part of a finger at a joint, especially where the finger joins the hand

lesions: a region in an organ or tissue which has suffered damage through injury

carnations: a double flowered variety in pink, white or red in colour

morgue: mortuary

indignant: feeling or showing anger or annoyance

cirrhosis: a chronic disease of the liver marked by the degeneration of cells

roentgens: a unit of ionizing radiation

### **Exercises:**

#### **I. Answer the following questions in one word or a phrase:**

1. Svetlana Alexievich won the Nobel Prize for Literature in \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The excerpt is taken from the book \_\_\_\_\_.
3. *Voices from Chernobyl* records the worst nuclear

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reactor accident in Chernobyl in the year \_\_\_\_\_.

4. Whose voice is recorded here?
5. Name the deceased fire fighter.

#### **II. Answer the following questions in one or two sentences:**

1. What was Vasily Ignatenko's job? Where did he work?
2. How was Vasily Ignatenko after the explosion?
3. Why was Lyudmilla not allowed to go near her husband?
4. What did Lyudmilla name her baby and why?
5. How did her baby die?

#### **III. Answer the following questions in a paragraph:**

1. How does Svetlana Alexievich record the personal accounts of the tragedy in her work *Voices from Chernobyl*?
2. Recount the story of Lyudmilla Ignatenko as narrated by Svetlana Alexievich.

#### **IV. Attempt an essay on the following questions:**

1. Describe how Svetlana Alexievich's book *Voices from Chernobyl* becomes a monument to suffering and courage in our time?
2. How does Svetlana Alexievich react to the human enthusiasm for nuclear power?

#### **Activity:**

1. Read the excerpt "Children's Chorus" from *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear*

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*Disaster and compare it with the excerpt prescribed.*

2. There were mass protests and campaigns against the Nuclear Power Plant at Kudankulam, Tamilnadu. Imagine that you are a resident and an active social activist who worked against the nuclear plant at Kudankulam. As a representative of the residents of the area write a collective letter to the President of India detailing your concerns.

## BREAKING SILENCE

**Janice Miri Kitani**

### Introduction:

Janice Miri Kitani (1942– ) is an award-winning poet, dancer, activist and educator who is renowned for her commitment to work that addresses the horrors of war. She advocates against institutional racism and the enslavement of women and the poor. She is the author of four collections of poetry and has edited numerous literary anthologies. In 2000, she was appointed Poet Laureate of the city of San Francisco.

Born in Stockton, California, Miri Kitani was incarcerated as an infant with her family in the Rohwer concentration camp in Arkansas during World War II. Following their release from camp, her family moved to Chicago to avoid the racism that was still rampant on the West Coast, but soon after, her parents divorced. When Miri Kitani's mother re-married and relocated to rural Petaluma, the five-year-old Miri Kitani was forced to endure years of emotional isolation, poverty, and the trauma of sexual abuse by her stepfather, which lasted for nearly a decade. These repressed emotions, both personal and those of the Japanese American community who suffered during

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*\*Miri Kitani and Janice Miri Kitani  
and we were young.  
the war, became the basis of her poetry in coming  
years.*

As depicted in her own writing, the 1960s were a tumultuous time for her both personally and politically. Although she graduated from UCLA and received a teaching credential from UC Berkeley in this period, she continued to struggle with questions of identity and stereotypes of Asian American women. In 1970, while pursuing a graduate degree in creative writing at San Francisco State College, she participated in the Third World Liberation Front, joined the artist collective Third World Communications and became the editor of *Aion*, one of the earliest Asian American literary publications. In the late 1970s, she began working with artists and writers to edit *AYUMI, A Japanese American Anthology*, a major bilingual anthology featuring four generations of Japanese American writers, poets, and graphic artists. Her first book of prose and poetry, *Awake in the River*, was published in 1978.

In addition to being a prolific writer, Miri Kitani is also the founding president of the Glide Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing services for San Francisco's marginalized communities. She has developed more than eighty programs for the poor and homeless to encourage them to make meaningful changes in their lives to break the cycle of poverty and dependence.

Her dedication to community activism and advocacy has received worldwide recognition. She is the recipient of more than 40 awards and honours,

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including the prestigious American Book Lifetime Achievement Award for Literature. In 1988, the California State Assembly named Miri Kitani "Woman of the Year" in the 17th Assembly District.

Janice Miri Kitani's published books are: *Awake in the River* (1978); *Shedding Silence* (1987); *We, the Dangerous* (1995); and *Love Works* (2002). In 2014, she released a fifth collection of poems entitled *Out of the Dust: New and Selected Poems*.

Janice Miri Kitani's poem "Breaking Silence" reflects on the knowledge of silence of the generation of Japanese-American. This is a poem that focuses on the experiences of Japanese-Americans when they were put into internment camps during World War II. She expresses her mother's experience feeling dehumanized and isolated from the world. Miri Kitani expresses that her mother did not have a voice and with her expression of silence she leads to a brutal experience of how Japanese-American's were treated.

The poem is about three generations of women and the similarities and differences of their lives and their worlds. The speaker is the woman in the middle - a woman who has a daughter and a mother. The speaker begins with her daughter and indicates how the daughter does not understand her, because the daughter is living in her modern world. Then she describes her own world, and her mother's world. Each of the three worlds has different imagery - the speaker's, her daughter's and her mother's.

"Breaking Silence" speaks of the appreciation and admiration a daughter has for her mother as she

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testifies against wartime injustices. Janice Miri Kitani expresses the brutality of how the Japanese-American's were treated. The poem puts an emphasis on the protocol of internment and a dialogue with a Commissioner. The power of silence that Miri Kitani describes in the poem shows sorrow and frustration. Silence was the only way they could express their ideas and thoughts. Janice Miri Kitani concentrates on her mother's pain, how she grew up with that pain, and what it all represents. She writes expressing the political agenda, speaks out against people of colour, violence and containment her mother went through.

#### **Text:**

#### **Breaking Silence**

After forty years of silence  
about the experience of Japanese  
Americans in World War II concentration  
camps, my mother testified before the  
Commission on Wartime Relocation and  
Internment of Japanese American  
Civilians in 1981

For my mother

There are miracles that happen  
she said.  
From the silences  
in the glass caves of our ears,

### *Signatures*

from the crippled tongue,  
from the mute, wet eyelash,  
testimonies waiting like winter

We were told  
that silence was better  
golden like our skin,  
useful like  
go quietly,  
easier like  
don't make waves,  
expedient like  
horse stalls and deserts.

"Mr. Commissioner . . .  
... the U. S. Army Signal Corps confiscated  
our property . . . it was subjected to  
vandalism and ravage. All improvements  
we had made before our incarceration  
was stolen or destroyed . . .  
I was coerced into signing documents  
giving you authority to take . . ."  
to take  
to take.

My mother,  
soft as tallow,  
words peeling from her  
like slivers of yellow flame.

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Her testimony,  
a vat of boiling water  
surging through the coldest  
bluest vein.

She had come to her land  
as shovel, hoe and sickle searing  
reed and rock and dead brush,  
labored so to sinew the ground  
to soften gardens pregnant with seed  
awaiting each silent morning  
birthing  
fields of flowers,  
mustard greens and tomatoes  
throbbing like the sea.

And then

All was hushed for announcements:  
“Take only what you can carry . . .”

We were made to believe our faces  
betrayed us.

Our bodies were loud  
with yellow screaming flesh  
needing to be silenced  
behind barbed wire.

“Mr. Commissioner . . .  
. . . it seems we were singled out  
from others who were under suspicion

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Our neighbours were of German and  
Italian descent, some of whom were  
not citizens . . . It seems we were  
singled out . . .”

She had worn her work  
like lemon leaves,  
shining in her sweat,  
driven by her dreams that honed  
the blade of her plow.  
The land she built  
like hope  
grew quietly  
irises, roses, sweet peas  
opening, opening.

And then  
all was hushed for announcements:  
“. . . to be incarcerated for your own good  
The sounds of her work  
bolted in barracks . . .  
silenced.

Mr. Commissioner . . .  
So when you tell me I must limit  
testimony,  
when you tell me my time is up,  
I tell you this:

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Pride has kept my lips  
pinned my nails  
my rage coffined.  
But I exhume my past  
to claim this time.  
My youth is buried in Rohwer,  
Obachan's ghost visits Amache Gate.  
My niece haunts Tule Lake.  
Words are better than tears,  
so I spill them.  
I kill this,  
the silence . . .

There are miracles that happen  
she said,  
and everything is made visible.  
We see cracks and fissures in our soil:  
We speak of suicides and intimacies,  
of longings lush like wet furrows,  
of oceans bearing us toward imagined riches,  
of burning humiliations and  
crimes by the government.  
Of self-hate and of love that breaks  
through silences.

We are lightning and justice.

Our souls become transparent like glass  
revealing tears for war- dead sons  
red ashes of Hiroshima

*Signatures*

jagged wounds from barbed wire.  
We must recognize ourselves at last.  
We are a rainforest of color  
and noise.  
We hear everything.  
We are unafraid.

Our language is beautiful.

**Glossary:**

expedient: convenient and practical although possibly improper  
confiscate: seize someone's property with authority  
incarceration: the state of being confined in prison  
coerce: persuade to do something by using force or threats  
tallow: a hard fatty substance made from animal fat in making candles and soap  
descent: the origin or background of a person in terms of family or nationality  
hone: sharpen  
irises: a plant with showy flowers typically of purple or yellow and sword shaped leaves

**Exercises:**

- I. Answer the following questions in one word or a phrase:
  1. "Breaking Silence" focuses on the experiences of \_\_\_\_\_ when they were put into internment camps during World War II.

### *Signatures*

2. Who is testifying against the war crime injustices in the poem?

3. Whom is she giving the testimony to?

**II. Answer the following questions in one or two sentences:**

1. Why did she say that "silence was better"?

2. Why were the Japanese-Americans made to believe that their faces betrayed them?

3. "My youth is buried in Rohwer". Explain.

4. How does the poet end the poem?

**III. Answer the following in a paragraph:**

1. Theme of the poem "Breaking Silence".

2. Explain the significance of title of the poem.

3. Irony in the poem.

**IV. Attempt an essay on the following questions:**

1. How does the poet show her sorrow, anger and frustration through the poem?

2. How does Janice Miri Kitani describe the power of silence in the poem?

3. The poet brings out the pain of racism through the poem. Explain

**Activity:**

1. Read Traise Yamamoto's nonfiction narrative *Different Silences* and compare the theme to the poem "Breaking Silence".