

Due: Thursday April 30, by midnight: email, plus hard paper next day.

6 pages, On Oe Kenzaburo, A Personal Matter

Based on what you have read this semester:

- How does Oe situate Bird's "situation" in the context of Asian Literature?
- How does he deal with the issues of alienation and authenticity in ways that differ from the other writers we have read?
- How does he approach the issue of Asia being in a world that is militarily and politically dominated by the Western powers?
- How does he approach the issue of human value? What are the qualities/actions that give value to human life?
- How does he approach the issue of people's ability to communicate with others?

On writing papers:

- documentation is important; page numbers; source citations.
- it is important to provide a tracing of how you reach conclusions...
- start with citations, real quotes: be empirical in your approach: start with evidence
- The "so what" question: each of these books has given meaning to generations of people
  - resonated with the problems they faced
  - helped them think through their issues
  - helped people think about their world in new and different ways
  - challenged the way people approach issues (Oe is disturbing)
  - occasionally re-affirm the way people approach issues
  - literature has ways of exploiting people's anxieties
  - it has ways of practicing our emotions, rehearsing our fears (Philip Alcabes on Jon Stewart; author of Dread; spoke of rehearsing our fears)
  - the really good literature is unsettling:
    - it points its finger back at us (Oe)
    - it says "aren't we the problem?" or "isn't the problem with you, the reader?"
- You need to branch away from the text, and look to context.
  - how is society changing?
  - how is the world changing?
- My grading is not about *giving penalties*: I'm trying to challenge you
  - I just want to extract more
  - If you feel glum about your last grade, I want you to see it as a challenge
- Literature isn't about the facts...
  - it's not about getting the right answer...
  - it's about trying to put stories together out of other stories...
  - Be interesting!

My overall grading can basically be summed up as:

D - failure to write a proper paper, or give adequate references, etc.

C - you have demonstrated that you have read the material and understood it basically.

B - you have demonstrated that you can do a basic analysis of a passage.

A - you have gone beyond a basic analysis to show how the author uses the work to creatively restructure or reframe an understanding of the world.

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"And the minute I decide to murder the baby and go to Africa with you, it's back in my pocket again." [p190]

"Bird, do you suppose there are people who want an atomic war, not because they stand to benefit from the manufacture of nuclear weapons economically, say, or politically, but simply because that's what they want?... I just wonder if somewhere on this earth there aren't lemming-people..." ... In fact, he was aware of a black-hearted lemming presence whispering through himself... [p194]

Kenzaburô Ôe. *A Personal Matter*. translation by John Nathan. New York: Grove Press. 1968.