

# ENGLISH BREAK

VOLUME 26 - SPRING



POEMS

20

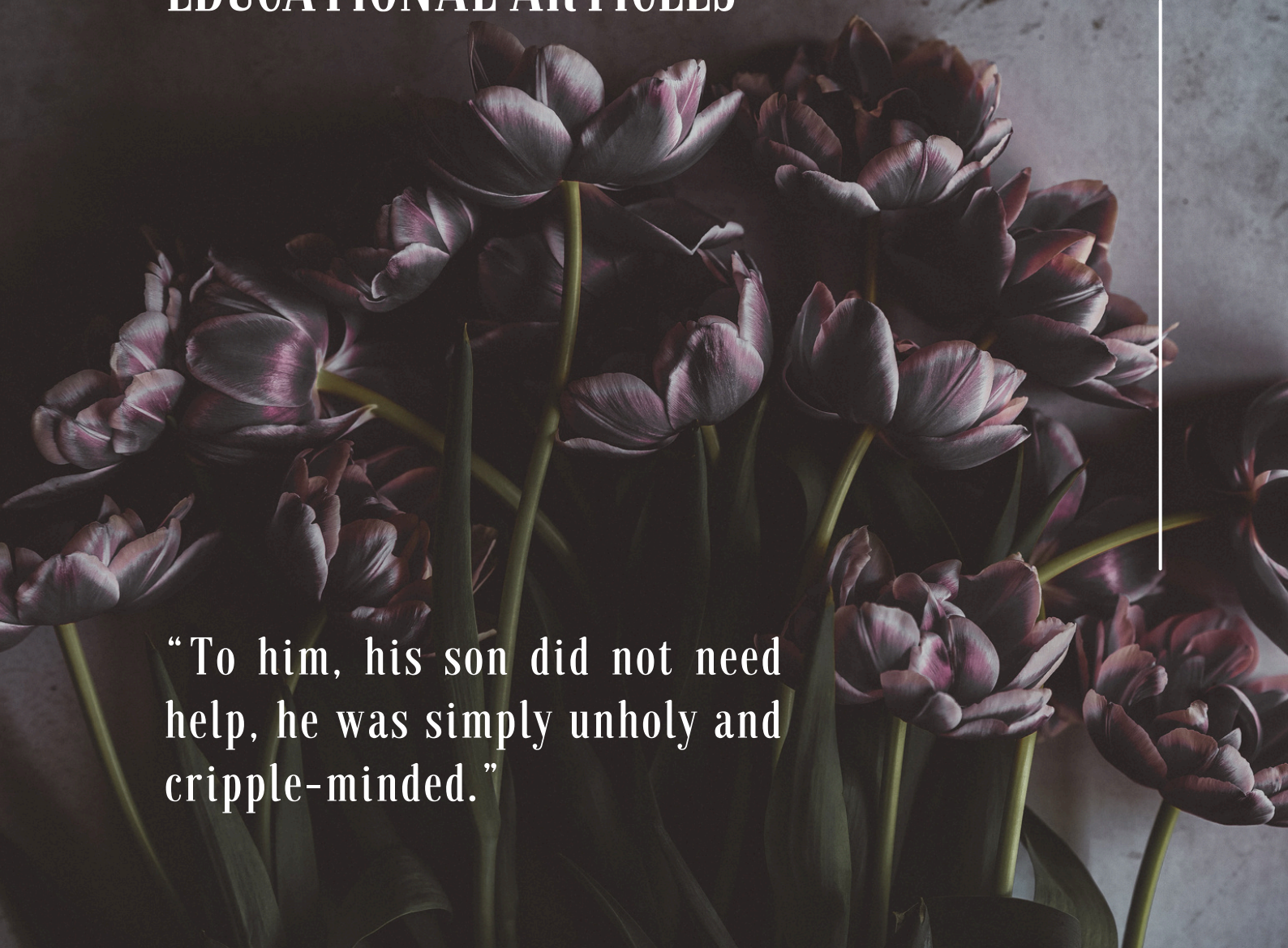
SHORT STORIES

24

CRITICAL TEXTS

EDUCATIONAL ARTICLES

“To him, his son did not need help, he was simply unholy and cripple-minded.”





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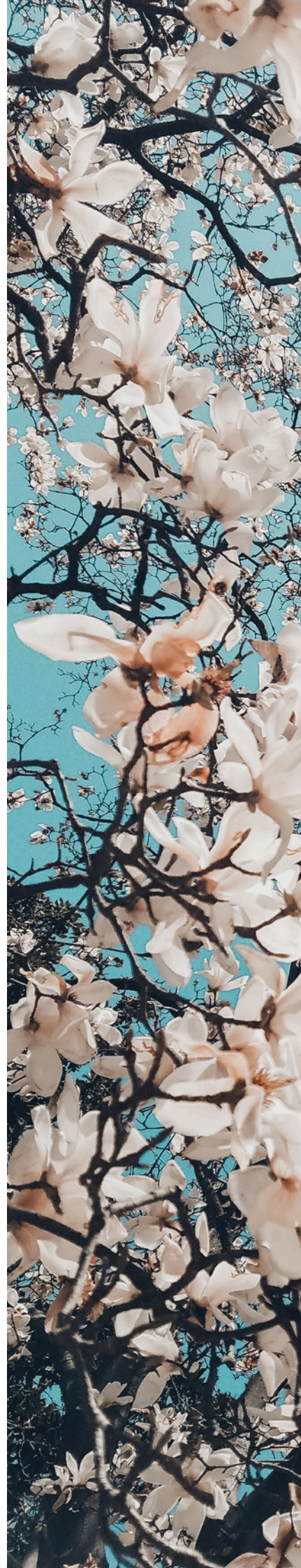
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شماره 26 - بهار 1403

صاحب امتیاز: انجمن علمی-دانشجویی زبان و ادبیات  
انگلیسی دانشگاه الزهرا(س)

مدیر مسئول: سما عشوری

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ویراستاران: سما عشوری، سیده عسل بهشتی، مهشاد  
فریدونی، پرستو حدادی، نیلوفر فلاح خیرخواه، هانیه زارع  
سهیلی، ندا بهمنی، کیانا وثوق، شقایق طاهریان، کیمیا  
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هیئت تحریریه: هانیه زارع سهیلی، سیده عسل بهشتی، سما  
عشوری، ملیکا هاشم پور، کیمیا آزادفلاح، عماد کیوان، ناهید  
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نشانی: تهران، میدان ونک، خیابان ده ونک، دانشگاه  
الزهرا(س)، واحد نشریات



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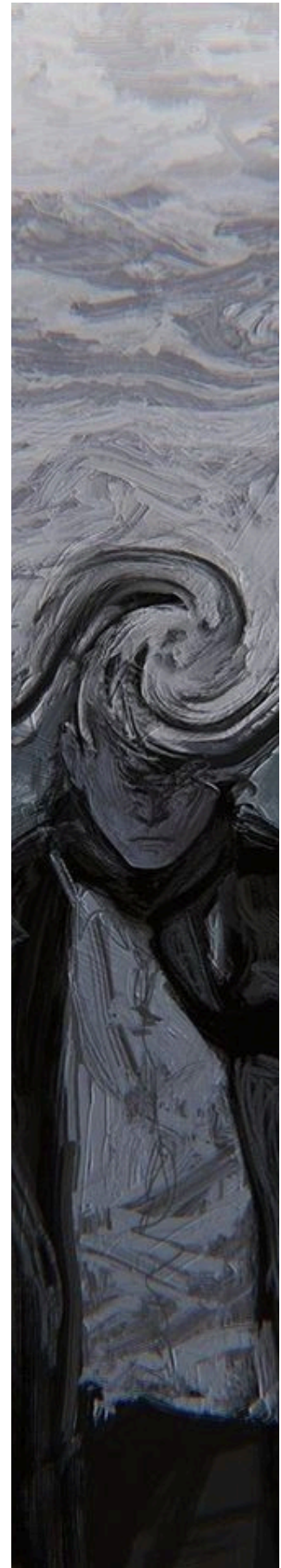
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# WILL YOU OBEY THE CULT?

By Melika Hashempoor

My mind prances in the most peculiar way  
A sinful ritual, of flesh, death and decay  
To think, to feel, realize and ponder  
Ain't got no legs, but it sure likes to wander  
A creature of satisfying hunger  
A thirsty monster lurking under the thunder  
The deepest splits are not black, but grey  
Not to be found in heaven or earth, in your brain they lay  
A limitless fault that is and isn't your fault  
Asking you constantly, "Will you obey the cult?"







# Life is Very Beautiful

By *Asal Beheshti*

Beautiful  
is the world we live in  
Horrendous  
is the world we have come to know  
Beauty is in its every corner  
so is void of it  
We are sometimes either  
too small or too big to see either  
Ah, humans!  
Too big to see the beauty  
Too small to keep it  
there, there  
Too small in the darkness  
Too big to fit in  
it breaks  
hearts – my heart



There's beauty even in the smallest paradoxes of the world  
take a look at the word "small" for instance,  
in comparison to the word "big" it has more letters  
it's quite bitter-sweet actually

Wondering why?

well to seem bigger than what it is  
inside, it hurts to be small  
does it not?

But Big? Does it... really like to be big, you reckon?  
maybe, just maybe, it's gotten tired of being the bigger  
person, people... it's easy, too easy to get  
tired, of people

Sometimes you want to be small-er  
sometimes you Have to be  
small, minute, inconceivable even  
hide in plain sight

Maybe not even choose it  
but let it  
fade

U

I

Have  
personally, faded  
Into a mere vessel

Words are all I  
Need

To know what life is  
the biggest question of eternity  
life is as big as it is as  
small as it is, it could be  
All we need  
but  
it isn't now, is it  
Darling?  
Are you here? Still  
Are you hearing  
me?  
I swear I will always listen



For words are all I  
am here for  
you  
are only you if you speak your truth  
It's subjective  
to its objects  
playthings  
we are nothing more, are we now?  
Darling,  
I have become  
what I had feared the most as a child  
A ghost  
Unseen in plain sight  
lost in the light  
and the darkness of the world  
creeps from within me into the light  
Darling,  
I have seen the world through  
my own eyes, it's  
pointless, empty and dark  
It doesn't have to be  
but dear  
I Am  
A lost cause  
You are all I have found  
within me, you are all I've found  
I am a vessel for you to see  
the world from an outside perspective  
Cause through the small holes  
cut in the executioner's dark mask,  
life may very well be just  
dark, aching and flawed  
  
but for the to-be executed  
those last breaths,  
those first and final rays of the new sun,  
Life, will always be and always is very beautiful





# Suffering

By Kimiya  
Azadfallah

I heard once

“Humans are bound to suffer.”

Suffering is what makes us complete;

Suffering is how we appreciate the beauty of the most mundane things.

Suffering is making art to show how you are suffering,

Forcing yourself to write a poem when you should be sleeping.

Suffering is when you know you should be sleeping, but your brain doesn't think so, does it?

Being forced to exist and be part of the human race, Oh, What a glorious error!

When you don't have anything to present to the world,

When you see how different You are compared to the other living things,

Don't you stand out like a sore thumb?

You know you should do something, but you are holding the losing hand, aren't you, dear?

I deeply believe that humans are to be doomed,

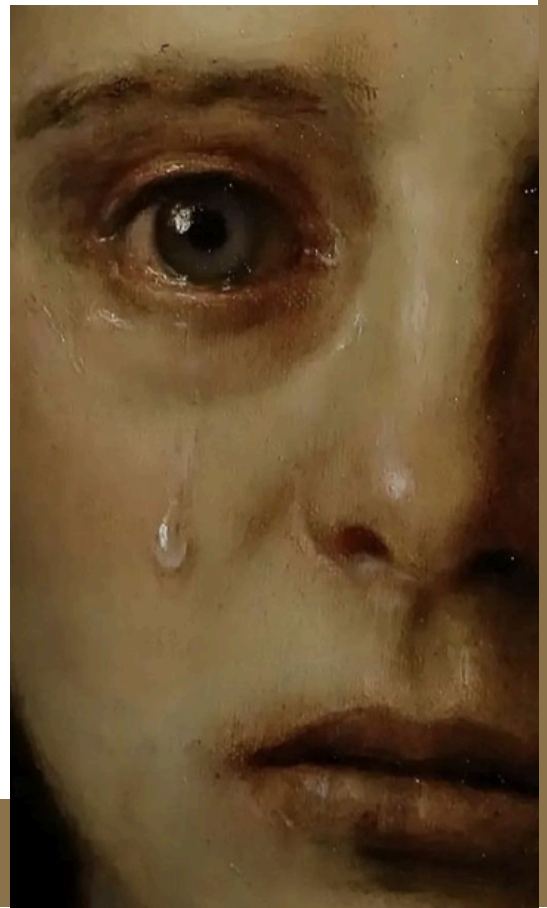
Suffering might just be an act of mercy,

Getting us going towards the end...

Hence, if I may correct Descartes,

I must declare:

"I suffer; therefore, I am."



# To My Therapist

By Yazdan Khoshsiraf

I had this luxury  
To be able  
To afford  
Sounds to make  
Words to babble  
Burst my bubble  
Know myself  
and my self.

I had this luxury  
You  
Sitting there,  
On your wooden rusty chair,  
With your receding hair  
line by line from what  
Frued taught you  
To ask me  
So, I can act – knowledge  
My self and mistakes  
And stakes  
I didn't eat  
To beat to muse  
Ick!  
is my womanly manhood  
abused...  
Hunting, we were  
in my mind  
Like Robinhood

I had this luxury  
To afford these words  
Sealing from the past  
And feeding the now

Bow down to tears  
Dropped out of my shell  
From the depth of my  
Well  
Being  
Better now  
Cause the way I learned  
To ask me about me.

I had this luxury  
Until you had to ruin it.  
I don't absolutely hate you for it  
I know why you're doing it  
You need to charge more  
So, you can have charge more  
Barge lure light bore  
Knees sore kill for  
The freedom of my thoughts.  
You helped me  
become a hoarder  
Of words and thoughts  
And chaotic orders.

I had this luxury.





# LAKE

By Asal Pazhoom

The chilly autumn breeze  
Crept up on your face  
As you were watching me  
I said I needed space.

As I was sitting on the wall  
And peering into the lake  
I smiled at the monsters above  
Oh how they've toyed with my fate.

You looked at me heartbroken  
Said you wanted to stay  
I said, "I'm better off forgotten.  
If you stay then you will break."

I could never give a reason  
I could never voice the cause  
But every breath feels like treason  
If not followed by pain and blood.

And you said I would be lonely  
Then I said I would be fine  
I'm not here for you to know me  
I'm just here to give you love.

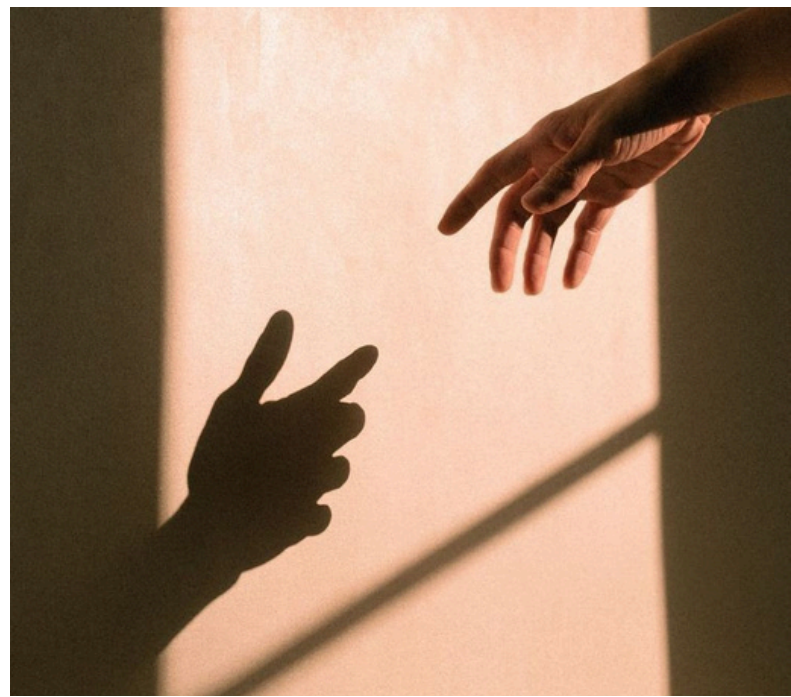
I'm the shadow on your wall  
So you wouldn't feel alone  
I'm there to catch you when you fall  
But wouldn't let you walk through  
the door.

I wasn't made to be loved  
I'm not meant to be adored  
I am painful to the touch  
With fears and tears I am adorned.

I'm here to sing to you  
Love songs and sacred lullabies  
And to breathe life into you  
but I'm pain personified.

The frosty winter gale  
Slapped you hard across the face  
"What a devastating tale,"  
You said, now looking pale.

And then I jumped off the wall.  
Walking calmly to the lake,  
I smiled at you for one last time.  
Then dove into my jail.



# CHIRP OF A MAYHEM

By Kiana Vossough

And in the corner of my heart,  
I could sense a rhythm;  
dance of the emotions,  
Exhumed from the depths.  
Haunting hoary flames,  
Crossing every bridge.





# I HAVE OUTSTAYED MY WELCOME

By *Mahdiya Salarie*

The mansion walls grow  
behind me  
As I tread down the  
corridor.  
These gates are rarely  
welcoming;  
They bite down and chew  
on the bones.



This mansion is tired and old.  
Savage tides wash ships from shore  
I've repeated as I've been told:  
Change is inevitable;  
Perhaps I should let go.

Beasts and creatures in the dungeon  
Are bound by chains and curses.  
Each night I escape a nightmare  
Of one singing the songs of nurses.

There are crawlers in the walls;  
My skin itches from their touch.  
I have outstayed my welcome—  
They whisper to me as such.

It's a matter of time before  
The passageways slither around,  
And then, only then,  
Will I have to leave it all behind.

# *Delusion*

**By Emad Keyvan**

I came to you but you ran away  
I never knew why you left,  
Cause I thought you loved me deeply.  
I can't shut your voice off in my head.  
Can someone perish this crazy whisper?  
Oh, I loved you like the sun loves the earth.  
I loved you like oceans love sand;  
I loved you like clouds love the sky;  
I loved you like night loves darkness;  
I heard people saying "Don't be too in love."  
But I didn't listen, because I assumed you were different .  
Now I'm all alone;  
I'm all alone in the present, past and future;  
I'm all alone in the silence and crowds;  
I'm all alone under the sun, under the moon.  
Is anyone here to tell me that this isn't real;  
That this wasn't real;  
That all of it was just a stupid dream.  
I looked in your eyes and was never the same person I used to be.  
I saw your smile, and I didn't know any other smile since then.  
I smelled your perfume then forgot my existence  
You said to me, "I'll be yours forever."  
And I simply believed you.  
I loved you like a child loves her mother;  
I loved you like rain loves falling.  
I loved you like a bird loves flying;  
I loved you like a tree loves spring wind;  
I loved you like myself.



---

# ANOMIOUS TEMPLE

By Nahid Seyfi

Out! not from afar, here, in an Anomious exile,  
A terrestrial temple owns a wordless queen among.  
Autumn cries in cracks of walls, trembling lyre's wire.

Crispy walks of rowdy crowd carol chorus in her shrine,  
Mal-promised fate, Alas! her tunes of life remain unsung.  
Out! not from afar, here, in an Anomious exile,

Craves she the road, along the window's greyish pile.  
A day in dead December, among suspense of autumnal tongue.  
Autumn cries in cracks of walls, trembling lyre's wire.

The maiden minder, mind for ailing passers-by,  
Nothing knows her but a fate of chagrin clung.  
Out! not from afar, here, in an Anomious exile,

Chanting only tunes, lyre whining of nun's desire,  
Embracing the flames dancing all night along.  
Autumn cries in cracks of walls, trembling lyre's wire.

The moon rose over the temple as he came in sigh,  
Feverish rushes she toward his being high-strung.  
Out! not from afar, here, in an Anomious exile,

Shiver of his woeful cry burst the hush of rusty shrine,  
"Ah, there you are!" said the exiled in a sorry sung.  
Autumn cries in cracks of walls, trembling lyre's wire.

Repose round the fire, his hair on her old-cloth attire,  
“Now that he’s tarnished,” said the nun, “my lyre sing 'im a song.”  
Out! not from afar, here, in an Anomious exile,

Twinkling stars round the temple, mirror drops in maiden's eye,  
Morrow, “He’ll talk the truth; hidden tale of a lifelong.”  
Autumn cries in cracks of walls, trembling lyre's wire.

His gaze stared in a morbid tune, lyre toned the whole shrine,  
Candles went down ‘n down, so the stars of the night along.  
Out! not from afar, here, in an Anomious exile,

The burning breeze forced cracks in the temple's tile,  
Round upon the flames, glimpsing light fading among.  
Autumn cries in cracks of walls, trembling lyre's wire.

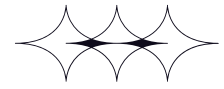
“How rickety its wires, like sore beneath my attire,”  
As she thought of the exiled, she fell into a dream drunk.  
Out! not from afar, here, in an Anomious exile,

She dreamt about the exiled cheering in style ‘n smile,  
Crazed she jumped; the autumn ran away, the winter came along,  
Autumn cries in cracks of walls, trembling lyre's wire.

Wind swept the temple, ting lyre to drop and clunk.  
The nun triste-tone sighed; “Who left the door swung!?”  
Out! not from afar, here, in an Anomious exile,  
Autumn cries in cracks of walls, trembling lyre's wire.



# HOME

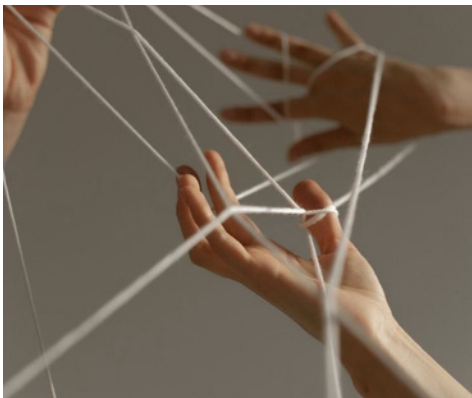


**By: Zahra Pirhadi**

Home,  
Where is home?  
I don't think it's a place,  
Neither a person.  
Maybe a feeling?  
Maybe where we are comfortable enough to express ourselves, to take the damn mask off.  
But what if even home had its own mask?  
Some say it's a place where you



can declare yourself without censorship,  
But does that place even exist?  
Home might feel like a space where you take things off your shoulder,  
But it can also feel like you're behind closed doors and you can't breathe  
What makes us call it home, though?  
Maybe because it's torturous to consider that some of us may not have a home.



I asked a fellow once, and he said, "Home can be a prison to educate to be free"  
It can be people you feel safe with, they say,  
Or people who believe in you.  
But what if my heart is horrified? Of people?  
You might feel connected to your surroundings;  
I don't deny that,  
I just can't see what that connection means.

You're supposed to be immune against judgments and threats in a place called home,  
But let me tell you that it can also be a dungeon of judgments and constant threats to your will.  
Sometimes your mind is afraid to even wonder what it's capable of wandering in such a place,  
Because you're just looking for ignorance against the people you think are your home.  
I'm cold here, and all my physical instincts are telling me to go back,  
But what keeps me staying here?  
At this certain point of time?  
Am I scared to go home?







# *Beyond The Garden*

**By Hanieh  
Zare Soheyli**

**(A conclusion to “Ripples of Faith” &  
“Promised Horizon”)**

“Thirty years ago.”

Once upon a time, nestled in a quaint neighborhood, stood a charming home with a delightful secret; A garden that bloomed with vibrant life in the backyard. The sun’s warm rays filtered through the emerald leaves while a small child gazed longingly through the window of his room. His eyes sparkled with joy and life, ready to step into the world of the unknown. From that vantage point, his curious eyes captured a mesmerizing sight, a tapestry of trees extending beyond the garden’s borders, their branches swaying gracefully in the gentle breeze. The child’s imagination took flight as he wondered about the mysteries that lied within the woods.

As the child’s mind wandered amidst the captivating glamor of the outside world, his thoughts were abruptly interrupted by the heavy footsteps of

his father. The scent of sheep lingered in the air, a reminder of his father’s daily work tending to the flock. With an authoritarian tone, he asked his son to carefully bring the old Bible, burdening the child with the task of reciting it again. The son did what he was asked obediently, looking even smaller than he was with the weight of expectations settling upon his shoulders. The child’s fingers trembled as he opened the sacred book, its pages filled with ancient wisdom and verses beyond his tender comprehension. He started reading a verse, trying to concentrate but his mind drifted back to the realm he desired to explore, the universe seemingly beckoning him towards a different kind of spirituality.

Months passed, and the child’s struggles with reading took on a new dimension of hardship. The words

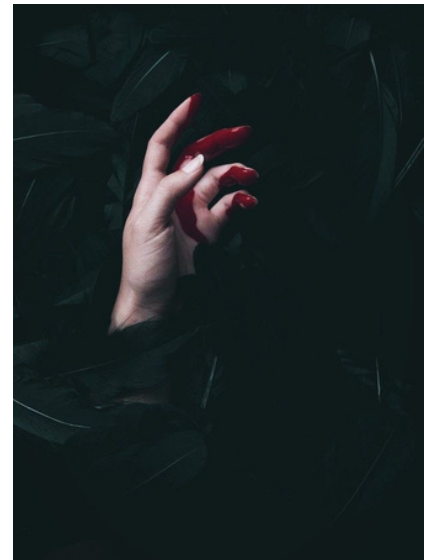


were running away from his gaze faster in each attempt to glorify the scriptures. Sadly, what could've been diagnosed as dyslexia had become an excuse for cruelty and mockery. The father, resistant to modern medical knowledge and dedicated to dogmatic beliefs, dismissed the notion of seeking help from the medical community. To him, his son did not need help, he was simply unholy and cripple-minded. When his father's face contorted with anger as his innocent voice stumbled over an unfamiliar word, the child's heart sank, a mixture of fear and confusion engulfing him while his father's voice thundered through the room, chastising him for his inability to properly recite the holy verses. In that moment, the child realized the harsh reality of his father's relentless devotion, one that demanded perfection and offered no solace for the innocent struggles of a young soul. In that ruthless environment, the child's yearning to explore became a desire. He wanted to escape the suffocating shadows of his father's disapproval.

On a fateful day, driven by an unyielding spirit, the child mustered the courage to flee the house, determined to find consolation in a heavenly realm. With each step towards liberation, a gust of wind playfully tousled his hair, whispering promises of newfound freedom. The sun was bathing his face in warm light, filling his heart with a profound sense of victory. As the boy sprinted towards his envisioned paradise, his eyes shut in exhilaration, fate dealt a cruel blow. The air crackled with the impact of his father's staff striking his face with a brutal force to stop him. In an instant, the world plunged into darkness. With everything being black and blank now, he faced a daunting journey, searching for a new path among the shattered fragments of his once-promising hopes.



Years had passed, and the boy, now stripped of his dreams and aspirations, existed in a desolate existence. One night, when he was staring deadly at his bedroom mirror, the faint whispers of a serpent reached his ears from his father's room. A glimmer of purpose sparked within him, and he stealthily navigated the hallway, gripping his father's staff for courage as he found it along the way. With caution, he crept closer, and upon opening the door confronted the menacing hisses of the serpent. Familiar with the serpent's unholy nature, he resolved to vanquish it, hoping to break free from his father's incessant mockeries and emerge as a Satan-killing hero. He slowly got close to it, the hisses getting louder than ever, piercing his brain like a sharp needle. He shouted to make the noise vanish and he stabbed its head repeatedly until its pathetic cries subsided, leaving a splatter of crimson upon his face. For a long time, he stood there, longing for his father's elusive pride to finally embrace him. He sat to collect the head as his trophy, touching the lifeless body of a man, only to discover his own father



lying before him. Shockwaves of disbelief and realization coursed through his veins as he picked up the book he had mistakenly associated with the serpent's hisses, recognizing it as the Bible. Consumed by rage, he tore all the sacred pages, convinced that his immense suffering was the direct result of the strict religious teachings imposed upon him. Each ripped fragment symbolized his rebellion against what he perceived as the source of his misery, a desperate attempt to sever the ties that had bound him in chains for far too long.

“The Present Day.”

The warder, desperate to evade the haunting memories and emotions summoned by the lunatic took a day off, unwilling to accept his fear of remembering what it felt like to have a dream. He spent his night at a bar, ignoring his feelings till he was out of his mind, but the first thing he recalled was the smell of fresh flowers and the breeze moving his hair under the bleeding sun. He got out of the bar, heading to a vacant alley nearby, sitting desperately on the ground and resigning to his feelings. He stared up at the inky swatches of the night sky peeking out from between the buildings. All the stars were hidden behind the cloak of pollution, but he could feel an airplane’s blinking lights making a slow journey above him. He remembered his dream of becoming a sailor, discovering new lands and never settling, he also recalled his father’s disapproval: That’s what pagans do boy! He closed his eyes. The promise of adventure or excitement seemed long gone, buried beneath the weight of his routine. He smiled, the innocent child slowly reclaiming his soul. At least, he could still see beyond the garden.

The next morning started with the fierce gaze of the warder fixed upon the lunatic. The man smiled as he felt a sense of purpose in his blank eyes. He stepped closer, the very air holding its breath and waiting for the outcome of this apocalyptic encounter.

-Hello mate!

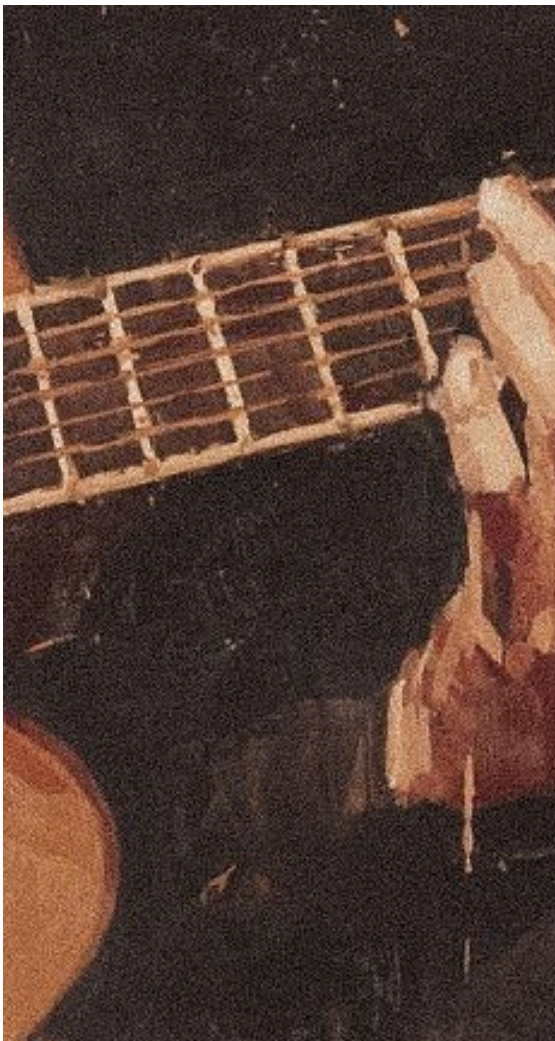






# The Red Symphony

**By Sama  
Ashoori**



Hello, my name is Tristan and I was just released from police custody. You are probably wondering why, or you simply might not care. Either way, I'm here to talk; to make myself understand what exactly I've been through. My scars, the bruises, the blood on my shirt, and the musical tragedy playing in my head... It all began with him...

The library was where we first met. The memory is clear as a day to me – as if it was just yesterday. The library was a safe space, somewhere to run to whenever I wanted to escape the senseless Judging faces, to run away from the chaos in my head... the one that sometimes even writing couldn't help go away. All I had to do was to pick up a book and let the words drown me. I was doing the same thing that day; wandering through the shelves and inhaling the sweet dusty smell of the old books, when I heard the beautiful strum of a guitar.



The melody was graciously beautiful, a melancholic tune that seemed to capture the soul. I followed the sound, drawn to it, and found its player. The man was in his thirties, with long black hair that covered parts of his forehead. His fingers were dancing on the strings of his guitar in skillful movements. His eyes were closed, and he seemed lost in the music, detached from the people and the world around him.

I approached him slowly, not wanting to disturb his peace. When I got closer, he immediately stopped playing and opened his eyes. I couldn't help but feel the intensity in his icy blue glance to the core, the way it seemed to pierce into my very soul.

'That's a beautiful melody,' I said, still wondering if I did the right thing starting a conversation with him.

'Thank you,' he replied, his voice calm. 'Hey, you look strangely familiar! Have we met before?'

'Oh no, I don't think we have. I would've remembered you otherwise' I said with absolute honesty.

'Okay,' he said with a chuckle. 'Nice to meet you then. I am Tristan, the music composer,' he said, extending his hand. 'And you are...?'

I hesitated for a moment before taking it, interested and shocked by this coincidence. 'My name is Tristan,' I replied. 'I am a writer.'

He smiled a cold grin, sending a chill down my spine. 'Tristan...A writer, huh? You have a way with words, a man of culture I see. You have this spark in your eyes; it's hard not to notice.'

I instantly felt a strange connection with him that I couldn't quite explain. We talked for several hours, discussed our passions and dreams, and shared our likes and dislikes until the library closed off, and we had to say goodbye. Walking home, I couldn't help but feel that I had just met someone extraordinary. Someone who was destined to change my life.

I bought his album the next day and played it. The songs had beautiful melodies with smart shifting in notes, but there was something very strange about them. I swear I could hear voices throughout the music. Not just the voice of the instruments, something extra... something that didn't belong there. It almost... sounded like... people... singing? I couldn't quite figure it out, it was very vague, almost impossible to decipher. Whatever the hidden lyrics were, it just made him sound more brilliant.

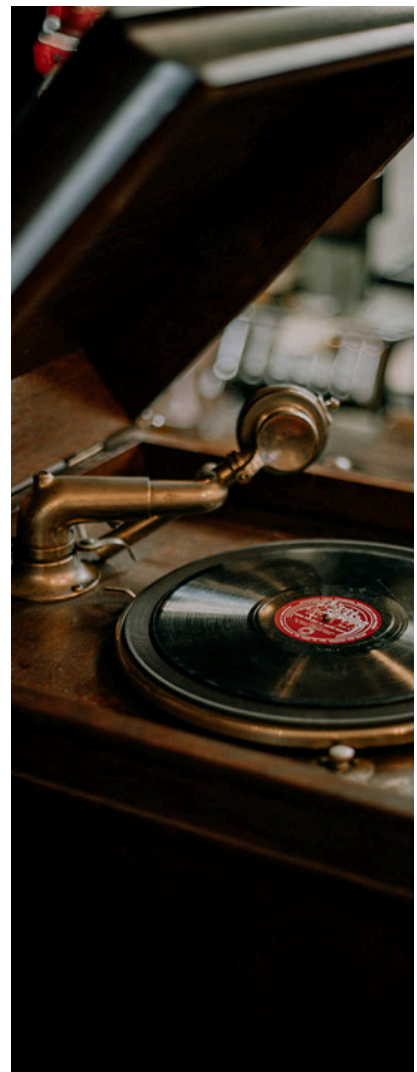
Just like that, days turned into weeks, and I found myself thinking about him over and over. I often visited the library, hoping to catch a glimpse of him, but he was nowhere to be found. I began to wonder if fantasy had won at last and I had imagined our encounter, if he was nothing but a figment of my imagination...

On that fateful day, as I was mindlessly searching through the shelves, I heard the familiar strum of a guitar. I instantly followed the sound, my heart racing with anticipation until I found him. He was sitting in the same corner, eyes closed, as he played a haunting melody.

I approached him again. As I got closer, I noticed the bloodstains on his clothes and the vague scent of iron that surrounded him like a shadow. I stalled for a moment, unsure of what to do, before finally giving in.

'I've been looking for you,' I said, my voice barely above a whisper. He opened his eyes and stared me down. That was when I realized I had truly missed his glance.

'I've been waiting for you,' he replied, his voice smooth and calm as I recalled. 'I would like to show you something, my composing lab. Would you like to have a look?'





He officially invited me to his home, and obviously, I accepted. I chose to ignore the blood stains, convincing myself that it was just my imagination. It was more important to find out how he made those enchanting lyrics and hid them so well in musical layers. I needed to know how the mystery was made.



We reached the destination. A big house located in the heart of the city. As we entered and walked down the hall, I couldn't help but feel a strange thrill. The atmosphere was gloomy, but alluring nonetheless. He led me to his laboratory which he explained was used for creating music. The room was faintly lit, shaping eerie shadows on the walls. The air was filled with the stinging scent of metal and fear. In the center of the room stood a piano. Its polished mahogany surface gleaming in the low light. Nearby, a cello leaned against the wall, ready to be played. A violin resting on a chair, its bow steady, waiting for the next note.

But that wasn't the unsettling part of the room. Alongside the musical instruments, there were tools and weapons of... torture. A rack, its frame creaking due to age, waiting ominously in the shadows. A couple of knives in different sizes, an iron chest ripper, two thumbscrews, and a choke pear on which stains of blood could still be seen. Perhaps it had been used recently and he didn't have the time to clean it up. Perhaps he was too busy planning his next move... *my* capture. That's when it clicked. That's when I knew... those voices were not lyrics. People weren't singing. They were screaming. He had used the screams of people... his victims... to create his music. He had hidden them in the multiple layers of melodies.



I felt a wave of nausea wash over me as I took in the horrifying scene before my eyes. I tried to run, to escape the nightmare that he had created, but he was a shadow no light could escape. I couldn't reach the door in time. He grabbed me and dragged me to a chair in the center of the room.

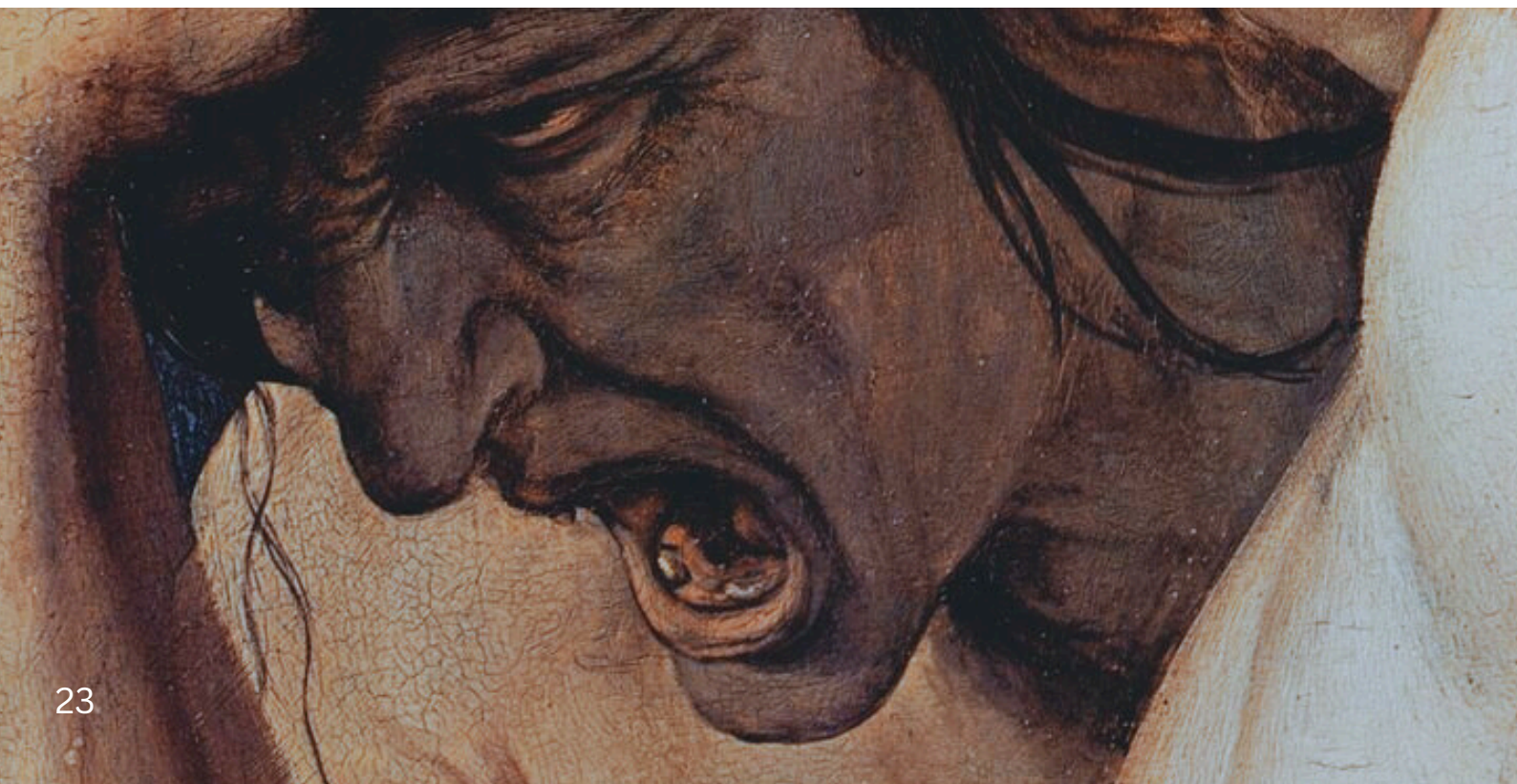
'Please,' I sobbed. 'Don't do this.'

He smiled like a maniac I had come to know. 'I'm not going to kill you, Tristan. I see the spark in your eyes,' he grinned even wider. 'It makes me shiver with joy. You have the potential to become something great, big, truly extraordinary.'

He tied me to the chair, his hands deft and practiced as he prepared his instruments of torture. I screamed, hoping for a savior, but my cries fell on deaf ears. He let out a psychotic laugh, 'Stop trying so hard, no one is going to hear you. No one is coming for you. Everyone in this neighborhood is used to the crazy sounds that come out of my lab. They know I'm a musician,' he came closer, his face so close I could feel his breath on mine. He started to whisper, 'And musicians are crazy, aren't they? We have our own unique ways of creating art. They never suspect the things that happen down here.'

He then chose a corner and began to play his guitar, an atrocious melody that seemed to match the very essence of the room, and it sank...deep within my soul.

As the hours turned into days, I had no choice but to think about him, to find myself drawn to him, fascinated by his twisted genius.



“Was he a music composer with a dark side, or a torturer with a love for music?” I wondered.

Perhaps it was someone who saw no difference between the two, who believed that the beauty of music and the brutality of torture were simply different expressions of the same human instinct. I watched as he tortured his other victims, how they begged and pleaded with me to help them and set them free, I saw their screams fading within the melody of his music as he recorded every soul. Time went by, and slowly, I came to terms with the fact that I could never go back to the life I had once known. I accepted it...

In the end, the screams didn't bother me anymore. The room was a symphony... a melody of blood, a place where the sweetest of sounds and the most horrifying of acts came together... in a twisted harmony.

The police eventually caught up with him, arrested him for his crimes and took me away. I am free now, but I know my mind is never truly free. I am tormented by the things I witnessed and the memories my captor composed in my head. Oh my composer, obsessed with the darkness that had consumed him...





**It's been a month since we've been separated:**

I'm beginning to act like Tristan, finding my way back to him. I miss the embrace of the darkness that had once terrified me. I've started to write again, pouring my twisted thoughts and desires onto the pages, but I know there has to be more to it. These pages are not meant to be filled with just my thoughts. They're too dark now. I believe we need color. I must add more color to the characters of my texts, just as he was trying to give color to the world of music. He was trying to make a change in this passive chaos, to leave something behind and become immortal. I feel like I owe him for making me understand...

Why don't I add my *own* color then? Why don't I paint *my* people? Let's write them with colorful ink... let's write them in *red!*

**40 days have passed since our separation;**

everybody is unique. They have their own special ways of creating art. Nobody will know how my process is done, nobody will find out.

Now then, hi there! My name is Tristan and now, *I'm* the serial killer...





# TO MY DEAR TEENAGE SELF

## By Hannaneh Safari

As I stand at this point in my life, I feel compelled to write this letter to you. The journey of college has come to an end, and here I find myself in the same shoes as you. I am well aware that the thought of finishing high school can be scary and daunting, bringing with it uncertainty, confusion, and a sense of loss. The good news is that college will make you forget about those feelings and will fill your heart with a purpose. The bad news? It is all temporary, and in four years, you will be stuck in the same stage of fear and confusion.

By the laws of the universe and cosmos, my current place and yours align in a symmetrical spot, both stray and numb. We share the same concerns and anxieties. I feel you inside me because I relate to whatever you are going through. But I need to tell you, as I yearn to hear these words myself, that the future is going to be okay. The journey of the 18-year-old naive girl stepping into the new phase of her life in the middle of a worldwide crisis is going to unfold beautifully. This beauty is born from euphoric joys and deep sorrows. You will meet people, and they will come and go.

You will brush past some people who will ultimately be your most cherished ones. You will dramatically end up hating those who were once beloved. Friends will fade away, and some will leave scars. You will feel emotions unlike any other, and those will shape you into a different mold. By the time you reach the end of this path, you will have celebrated your 22nd birthday and have transformed into a strong woman. You will have conquered the worst demon nesting inside of you and victoriously faced so many challenges. I pity you because you are only at the beginning, but simultaneously, I am proud of the young woman you will become at the end of the journey.

As I stand on the verge of a new chapter in our lives, I look up to no one but you, darling. I desire to be like you because the road you took, which is full of flowers now, was nothing but a wreck full of thorns and snakes. You were scared, but you embraced whatever the world threw in your path. You and I are both overwhelmed, but right now I am surrounded by loved ones. My veins are filled with the urge to survive and thrive. My heart beats with passion and despair. I promise to write to you once I've evolved into the woman you approve of and look up to.

I'm always here stepping forward.  
Sending love,  
Me.





# THE DUNGEON

By Taranom Mohammadi

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Ivan lives in the basement of a half-destroyed building. He never gets interrupted by anything in there. He only suffers. He even doesn't get interrupted by the suffering itself.

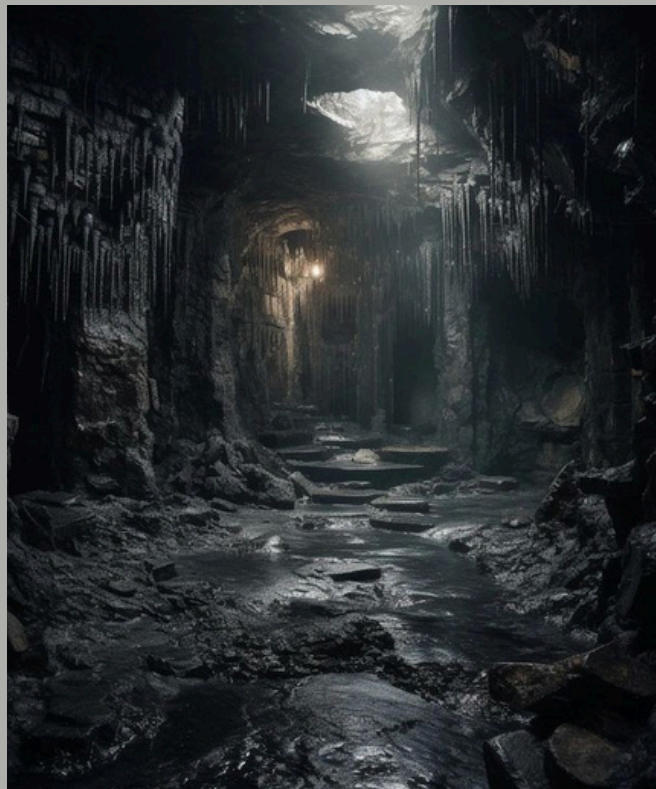
The basement is a dark, humid place, full of mud on the ground, but not for Ivan. He just lives in there. He only exists. Doesn't care if there is anything out there to interrupt him.

Ivan is pale. Ivan is weak. Ivan has got a scar on his face.

Has anyone ever asked him about his scar? Has anyone ever seen it?

He is unnoticeable. He is a shadow. He barely exists, or more accurately, he only exists.

Anyway, the scar was noticed by a snail, creeping on his face. It noticed a bump on his path and fell down. Until that day, he hadn't even felt the scar by his very own fingertips. When he did so, it kept him wondering where that strange thing came from.



Was it old or was it new? He couldn't tell. He didn't have a mirror to see himself in. he suddenly felt a warm beam of light on his back. It was the daylight. He wasn't usually aware of the time. His daily activities wouldn't change according to the presence of the daylight. Actually, his life was not limited by those trivial elements. If you could call any of this *life*, **at all**.

He looked up. There was a small hole in the ceiling that let the light in. In a moment's notice, his raven woke up, plunked and flew to that hole, aiming to escape from there, but then remembered it was too small for him and went back to his permanent spot on the niche.

The raven's whole existence could be summed up in certain restricted actions: waking up, flying to the hole on the ceiling, remembering he couldn't fit in, so flying back to his spot and staring at Ivan until the daylight was gone.

Ivan could never get on with its constant staring. It didn't quite exist to him. It was mostly a ghost that could control Ivan, until the night came and the raven would go to sleep. Ivan couldn't feel it, but was under its control. Did it actually exist? No one can tell. Did Ivan actually exist? we can't be sure of that either. But there is one thing we know:



The scar was real. The scar was the only thing that actually existed in that small, underground world of his. A snail had felt it. The scar could exist anywhere. It could stare at people's souls or dig a bigger hole to help the raven escape. It could ignore the existence of Ivan, which was ignored before by Ivan himself.

There was only one thing the scar couldn't ignore and it was the dungeon where they all existed.

The dungeon was the one that gave birth to them all. It was the origin of them. Without that, the raven would be free, too free to stay in the dark and stare at Ivan's soul, or take his chance on flying up the dungeon once a day. Everyone down there would probably heal and never go back to that dim wet place ever again.



# The Subject

By Zeinab Moradzadeh

“She used to be so sweet,” tears will be shed now that madness has finally caught up to me.

All of them, right here in this once forgotten room. The light will find its way to the curtain, the rays are stubborn like that – so was my madness. The coffee pot is full and they're late, but at least the tablecloth is clean.

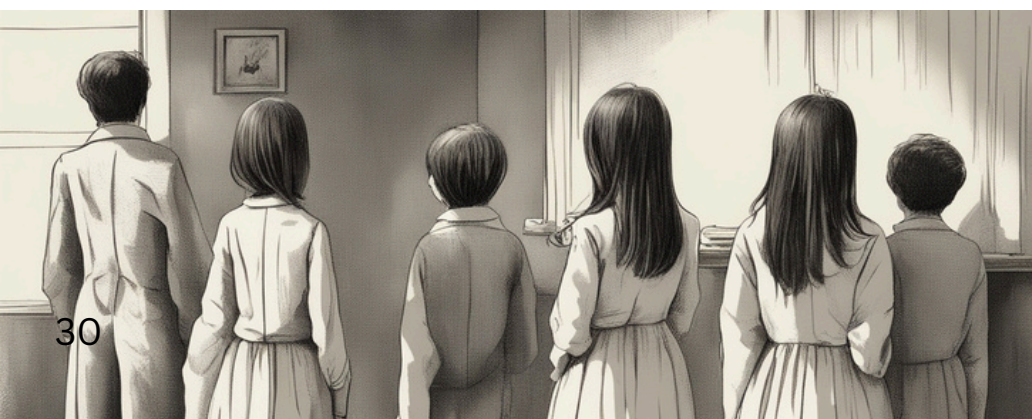
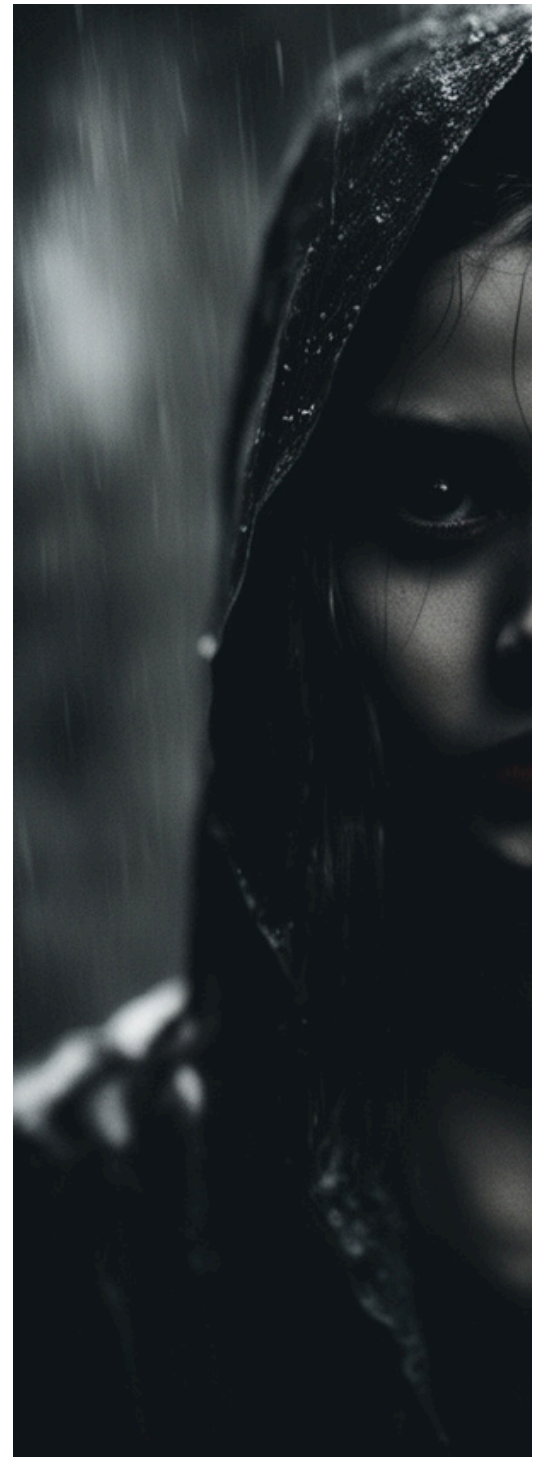
Finally, with their long black dresses dragging behind them, they sit in silence; wiping away their tears in a gentle manner. Remembering my glories, whispering to each other "Oh, you should have seen her before. How loving, caring; the most gifted child in the world."

Wise, young, ambitious, charming and fun. The right amount of everything, suitable, perfect, enough. Saying it proudly – like well-trained actors.

Sure... sure she was.

It's the afternoon. There are some clouds in the sky. Is it going to rain?

"A wonderful person, but she was kind of anxious, right"? Said the great-aunt, closely observing my pictures on the wall. She might find some mystery in the way I used to style my hair. "Yeah, just a little. She had kind of an attitude." Uncle cleared his voice. Who would've thought it would be me first, not him, with all the smoking?





Do you remember the time she left the family dinner too soon? throwing her jacket on the floor. Who does that?" littlest cousin joined. He always had a good memory. He exchanged a look with his sister, they're twins; there was always an alliance between them. "I know; she was so out of place. It seemed as if she could never quite... fit in. Let's have lunch."

They pass the salad and they get the permission to laugh. Tears are dried and lipsticks are retrieved. They seem refreshed, but the crease of their clothes is disappearing. None of the seats are empty and moving hands while holding drinks resulted in a few stains on the tablecloth.

They start recalling some imaginary memories of me, having a dream about me. Saying things that no one can deny or prove; the time I told one of them to drink warm milk with cinnamon to sleep better, when I pet their dogs on my way to their houses.

"I told her to stay at school. I knew she had something special in her bones, but she was careless with opportunities." My teacher's eyes softened "Oh, she could've been so much more." She is a full-time teacher after all.

Pouring rain is killing the candles one by one. I hope someone remembers that I liked rain but they keep talking about results – like football hosts, giving numbers, counting scores. Now remembering the actual memories of me; shallow breaths, disgustingly chewed nails, losing my patience.

Weird, damaged, not enough.

"Losing touch with us was the biggest mistake; that was when she fell and never bounced back again." At the tea time everybody agrees, while nodding heads with cute little sad faces, struggling with the toothpicks.

They're presenting my life and I'm not the presenter, but the subject. What an amazing team work and what a delightful evening, sadly coming to an end.

It was enjoyable to be the center of everyone's thoughts for a little while. Well, it's finished now. Like the coffee in the coffee pot.

"No way they are having another baby. How can they afford it?" Sarah chuckled. Hannah replied "I know, right? They don't even get along."

It's almost night. I'm already forgotten. The flowers they brought never replaced the damage they had caused to the garden, when they walked in. No-one was smiling; either laughing too hard, or staring at the exit door. Uncle's little son really wants to go, and my name will always accompany the thought, "Such a shame she went mad."

# The legend of the nine-tailed fox in an East Asian folklore

By Fatemeh Barzegar

Holi Jing, Kitsune, and Gumiho are the names of the legendary fox of East Asia, known by these names in China, Japan, and Korea, respectively. It is a creature with the face and body of a fox but with the distinction of having nine tails and magical powers setting it apart from regular foxes.

Interestingly, this legendary creature has garnered many fans, and today, the film industry, animation, and dramas have been created with that theme included of the nine-tailed fox, the most famous examples of which are Naruto – an anime, and Gumiho – a drama, which is produced in Korea helping this legend to continue thriving.

The origin of this folklore traces back to China, where Holi Jing was made of fire by the god Sam Shin. He created and bestowed upon him magical powers, leaving it to live among humans.

In all three countries, the nine-tailed fox is considered evil and cruel. with a penchant for consuming or conquering human bodies. As it ages and acquires more tails, when it gets its ninth tail, the color of the fox's fur turns white or golden and gains additional magical powers.

In folk tales, the numbers One, five, seven, and nine are commonly associated with the fox, but there are fundamental differences in the stories across these three countries.

The Korean Gumiho possesses the ability to transform into various forms freely. In Korean mythology, Gumiho often transforms itself into a beautiful woman to seduce young men, kill them, and eat their livers and hearts. It even masquerades as a bride and participates in the wedding ceremony in her place; a façade so seamless that the bride's own mother fails to recognize that she is not her daughter. Then, the next morning they find the groom dead without a trace of the bride.



Through its magical ability, it conceals its true identity and tails so effectively that its nature as a non-human will only be revealed when it removes its clothing or is compelled by humans to reveal its true form by magical methods. Numerous stories about Gumiho have been told, but only a few of them were documented in the Encyclopedia of Korean Oral Literature (Hanja).

The only story in Korea where Gumiho became a man not be women is the story of a maiden who discovers Gumiho through a Chinese poem.

Kitsune is a term that refers to both a fox and a mythical creature, the nine-tailed fox, in Japanese. Unlike China and Korea, the Japanese believe that there are two types of Kitsune. Zenko (good fox) and Yako (bad fox), Kitsune Zenko are portrayed in Japanese legends as loyal guardians or lovers, companions, or excellent friends of humans. On the other hand,

Kitsune Yako are known for their deceitful nature and their desire to trick people. Their victims are mostly young women. The fox spirit enters the victim's body by going under the victim's fingernails or by going through the women's breasts.

People who are possessed by the nine-tailed fox in Japan, are referred to as Kitsune Tsuki. These individuals are beaten to death or victim body burned to force the Kitsune to leave the woman's body. If these methods fail, they must seek help from a monk. For the rest of Kitsune Tsuki's life, the previously possessed woman cannot get married because no one would choose her to be his wife. Even the family of that woman will be rejected by society.



Unlike Gumiho, Kitsune has trouble hiding their tails when they turn into humans, and when they are drunk, a human can easily recognize them. When Kitsune obtains its 9th tail, it is promoted to Kyubino Kitsune, and gains the ability to see and hear anything in any part of the world, it also attains the knowledge of Linetas. One of the most famous Japanese legendary dramas is the tale of Nah. In Japan, kitsune are often seen with Inari, as a spirits are associated with the nine-tailed fox as a weapon. the way of this connection between the Inaris and the fox and why they decided to be a weapon for nine-tailed fox is evident in the story of Nah.

In certain legends, a fox acquires its first tail after a century. In the mythological stories of all three countries, the nine-tailed foxes possess a mystical ball or magical jewels or pearls, with all their power and, in some stories, their souls. They carry the hidden ball with them when they transform into their human form or capture a victim. They carry it in their mouth or on their tail. If they lose it and are separated from it for an extended period, they will die.


According to folklore, if a human finds the ball, the fox will grant them any desire they have. However, the Japanese believe that kitsune are highly cunning, if you do something for them, they will give you a precious gift, but after a short time, part of this gift will turn into a dry leaf, revealing that their gifts are not reliable.

If you travel to these three countries, you should not doubt the existence of the nine-tailed fox and their magical powers. It is important to note that if you deny them, you should wait to see this creature. As soon as you see it, you should clasp your fingers together in a diamond shape and remain in the middle. Keep doing it until the fox goes away to ensure your safety.

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A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a hand holding a white marker, positioned as if about to write on a dark grey chalkboard. The background of the page is a solid dark grey color.

# On Kumaravadivelu's *Understanding Language Teaching: From Method to Postmethod*

**By Atousa Mirzapour**

ESL/EFL instructors want to seek effective teaching methods in specific contexts. Educators around the world believe that there is no single methodology that could be assigned to all educational scenarios. They acknowledge that instructors must investigate all the methods, approaches, and strategies to design a particular methodology for a specific context. Bala Kumaravadivelu, Professor Emeritus of the Department of Linguistics and Language Development at San Jose State University, discusses ELT techniques from “a personal and professional perspective of English language teaching methods” in his book *Understanding Language Teaching: From Method to Postmethod* (2006). The book starts with a part that deals with language, learning, and teaching, and the second part is titled *Language, Teaching, and Methods*. The third part discusses Postmethod perspectives. This book tries to explain the development of paramount language teaching methods historically regarding the theory of language, theory of language learning, theory of language teaching, content specifications, input modifications, interactional activities, and a critical assessment.

The nine chapters of the book are divided into three main parts: One) Language, Learning, and Teaching, Two) Language Teaching Methods, and Three) Postmethod Perspectives. Chapter one investigates the theoretical concepts regarding exploring language as a system, discourse, and ideology. Language as a system goes around Chomskyan theories, believing language to be a set of components working together. They believe the study of language is the study of its systems and subsystems, including phonological, semantic, and syntactic. Chomsky discusses that there is a distinction between competence and performance. The former deals with the speaker-hearer's knowledge and ability, and the latter investigates the speaker-hearer's performance. Halliday, Hymes, and Austin explore language as a discourse. They study language in context. Halliday questions Chomskyan notion of competence. He believes in meaning potential. He discusses three functions of language: textual, interpersonal, and ideational. Language communication is the result of the interplay of all these functions. Hymes believes learners must be grammatically accurate and communicatively appropriate to communicate successfully. According to Hymes, communicative competence is defined as grammatical and sociolinguistic competence. While Austin believes language is an activity we do every day. He states the use of speech act and its components, including locution (the statement), illocution (intended meaning), and prelocution (expected response). The last one is language as an ideology that tries to link power, language, and domination. At the end of the chapter, language knowledge and language ability are defined.



Chapter two deals with the process of language development: input, intake, and output. Input is defined as an oral and written corpus of the target language that is exposed to the learner. Input must be accessible and available. Availability is when the learner is exposed to the target language, or the learners seek exposure such as simplified (the language of teachers and educators), non-simplified (authentic material), and interlanguage input (still developing language with peers).



Intake has been explored from two perspectives; product-oriented and process-oriented. Product-oriented considers intake as a subject of input and before processing; however, the second view believes that intake takes place after the psycholinguistic process. Intake is not measurable, quantifiable, or analyzable. The author has also investigated six intake factors, two variables within each, divided into two groups: learners' internal and external factors. Next, it discusses the intake process as inference (making some intelligent guesses to come up with a tentative hypothesis about all aspects of the target language), structuring (complex representation of establishment of mental representation of target language), and restructuring (sudden, incidental, and insight forming action). Output is a subset of what has been internalized; therefore, it is a part of input as well. Output is the written and oral corpus of the target language that the learner produces.

Chapter three deals with input modification (meaning-, form-, and meaning and form-based). It also explores textual, interpersonal, and ideational interactions. Textual interaction deals with linguistic features and formal concepts. Interpersonal interaction deals with responsibilities, personal relationships, and sociocultural aspects of language. Ideational interaction helps to shape identity.

The second part of the book starts with chapter four. This chapter aims to make a distinction between method, approach, and strategy. This chapter discusses Antony's model as approach (theoretical principal governing language teaching and learning), method (an overall plan), and technique (classroom activities prompted by teachers and performed by students). The second one is Richard and Rodgers' framework: approach (assumptions), design (the relationship between theories and function of instructional material), and procedure. The third framework is principle and procedure. Finally, Kumaravadivelu comes to a classification of so-called "methods", including language-centered, learner-centered, and learning-centered methods. Each of them is discussed in the following three chapters.

Chapter five investigates language-centered methods. It is supported by behaviorists in psychology and structuralism in linguistics. Behaviorists rejected the mental process of learning and brought a scientific point of view to the study of language, believing all kinds of learning, including language learning, are a process of habit formation. Structuralism believes that language is a system of some building blocks that are linearly connected. The syllabus design is synthetic with linear and discrete grammatical and lexical items. Input modification is form-based. Interactional activities are based on presentation, practice, and production process.

Chapter six explores learners-centered methods such as CLT. Its theory of language is supported by Chomskyan formal linguistics, Halliday fictional linguistics, Hymes sociolinguistics, and Austin's speech act of theory. They believe language is both a system and a discourse. Its theory of language teaching states that errors must be tolerated since they are natural consequences of using still-developing L2 when producing TL. Its syllabus is designed very much like language-centered methods emphasizing communicative needs. Input modification is form- and meaning-based. Its interactional activity follows the same process as language-centered methods. Chapter seven deals with learning-centered methods such as NA and CPT. They focus on cognitive psychology. Its theory of language focuses on the learning process. Its theory of language deals with the incidental development of L2. Its theory of language teaching talks about the role of the teacher. The teacher follows meaning-focused activities (what Prabhu (1987, p. 46) has called (a) information-gap, (b) reasoning-gap, and (c) opinion-gap activities), provides comprehensible input, integrates language skills, and makes incidental corrections. The focus is on comprehensible input. The content specification of learning-centered input is process-oriented with no specific preselected or presequenced syllabus. Interactional activities are mostly limited to textual interaction, a bit of interpersonal interaction, and neglecting ideational interaction (since there is no preselected syllabus).

The third part of the book starts with chapter eight. In Chapter Eight, the author explores five myths of method. These myths may prevent teachers from developing their own teaching methods. Chapter nine introduces three distinct pedagogic frameworks that provide the fundamental principles for educators to construct their unique variations of postmethod pedagogy. By adopting diverse perspectives, the authors of these frameworks demonstrate that postmethod pedagogy is not a uniform or singular entity. The concluding chapter focuses on the postmethod predicament, discussing obstacles that pose challenges to the development and implementation of a postmethod pedagogy. It provides an overview of the barriers affecting the conception and construction of such pedagogy.

The writer presents clearly structured examples to elucidate key ideas related to language, language acquisition, learning, and language teaching. Additionally, a thorough exploration of language teaching methodology is provided. The systematic organization of the content facilitates a more straightforward analysis of the goals within each section. The author expresses a well-defined perspective on language teaching, skillfully navigating the field's shift from method to postmethod language pedagogy.

One drawback of the book is that Kumaravadivelu mostly presents theoretical and philosophical concepts related to postmethod language pedagogy. Consequently, readers, especially active language instructors must try to implement these ideas in practical teaching situations. Moreover, numerous references to various other scholars make it a bit challenging for the reader to follow the text; nevertheless, there could be a valid reason for this—given that the book is an extensive exploration of language teaching. Furthermore, the challenging language choice poses a difficulty for educators with limited language proficiency in grasping the book's concept.

To conclude, this book serves as an invaluable resource for those who aspire to be at the forefront of contemporary language teaching. Its theoretical depth provides a comprehensive guide for educators looking to enhance their teaching approaches. The emphasis on social realism and contextual sensitivity offers a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved in language instruction.

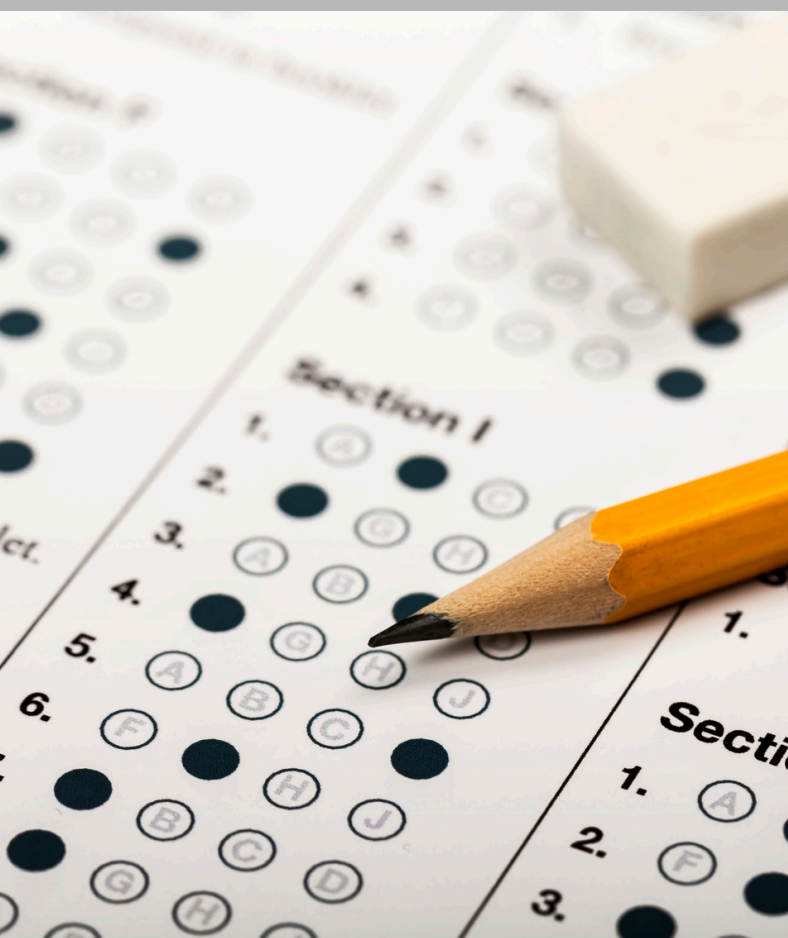
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# The Elimination of the General Courses from the Iranian University Entrance Exam, Konkur: Good or Blameworthy?

By Arefe Amini Faskhodi



While the history of “Konkur”, the Iranian University Entrance Exam, goes back to about 60 years ago, there have been considerable changes in this nationwide exam and the attitudes of applicants towards some subjects.

First, general subjects, i.e., general English, Persian literature, Arabic, and theology, have been eliminated from the list of subjects the applicants have a test on in the nation-wide entrance exam. This, in turn, has caused many high school students to quit learning English outside school and instead invest time in preparing for such a high-stakes exam. Second, part of the final

score judged for the students to be admitted to their desirable universities is obtained based on the final exams held in May and June, for each subject encompassing the general courses. There have been attempts to standardize such exams while including more conceptual items based on Bloom's taxonomy, albeit it seems there is no agreement over higher-order questions based on the taxonomy among the stakeholders. As an English instructor teaching English to 12th-grade students at a school where the 10th-grade students are selected among all the applicants based on their ranks in a norm-referenced test, the

applicants of the University Entrance Exam held in 2024, I have been encountering noticeable challenges. First, as a result of eliminating general English from their daily schedules, not surprisingly even those with higher levels of English, underperform. Moreover, as an English teacher, I am encountering another serious problem based on the false belief on the part of the school authorities according to which all the students at the school master English. In fact, as a result of washback, the effect of testing on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993) and its consequence, i.e., what is assessed becomes what is valued, which becomes what is taught (McEwen, 1995, p. 42, as cited in Cheng & Curtis, 2004), part of the time expected to be devoted to English has been allocated for the main subjects, e.g., biology, physics, math, chemistry, and courses alike depending on their field of study. Part of my classes are held simultaneously with those classes intending to prepare students for the national-wide entrance exam. These classes are held with less than five students, who have not registered for the preparation classes, in case these students appear in their classes. However, even when such classes are held, the instructor, like it or not, is obliged not to teach the new lessons and instead either review or practice the previously taught parts. After the final exam for the first semester, hardly have the 12th-grade students attended their English classes.

By-products of such changes are not limited to observation of a deterioration in the status of English among high school students. These days, even universities of repute are concerned with the English level of their new students in non-English majors, and sometimes administer exams and set cut scores for their applicants.

What has been mentioned is merely one part of the story considering the fact that the other three general courses, i.e., theology, Persian literature, and Arabic have been affected as well. Bearing in mind what has been mentioned regarding the resulting challenges, for both teachers and students, it seems the disadvantages of such changes outweigh the advantages. Thus, it is about time the authorities revisited the policies concerning the inclusion of general courses.

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