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### The Mirror That Reflects My Self and the Dressing of the Tale

When I was young, I was cross-eyed—a result of meningitis. In South Korea, many people tend to judge others by their appearance. I was bullied by students at school—they called me a “squinty pig.” I did not like going to school or studying.

I liked spending time reading books alone in my own space because I did not have any friends. At that time, I read anything I found—history, comics, science books. Storybooks were my favorite because the characters in the novels were like me. They were depressed, alone after being bullied, or discriminated against in their society. As I read them, I did not think I was alone and believed that there were people living in the same way as me in this world, with the same feelings.

Novels were like a mirror for me—they reflected my inner side, not my outer appearance. Despite the characters being of a different gender, race, generation, or occupation, every time I read their stories, I resonated with their feelings and the isolation, difficulties, and concerns they faced. For instance, when I read the novel *The Castle* by Franz Kafka, the protagonist K was definitely different from me. He is a man and a land surveyor, a character who lives in a different world, environment, and area from me. However, the loneliness and emotions he felt while living in a strange village were similar to my experiences in school in childhood.

Franz Kafka created narratives using fantasy and allegory rather than reality. As everyone knows, his novella “The Metamorphosis” is about the protagonist Gregor Samsa who wakes up one morning to find himself inexplicably transformed into an enormous insect. That story is not grounded in reality—it is just an imagination. However, how his family and co-workers deal with Gregor Samsa greatly resembles our reality. Many literary critics argue that Kafka named the character Samsa after himself. The spelling of KAFKA and that of SAMSA have the same vowel and consonant arrangements. We could see that Franz Kafka was revealing his own reality through the character of Samsa. In those ways, novelists seek reality by implicitly revealing themselves in fiction. They tend to begin the pursuit of reality with their innermost shrine. A tale is like a piece of clothing, where a novelist can hide and reveal herself at the same time, as if the tale was a kind-of a dress. I think novelists eventually write their own intimate stories in the various narratives, producing reality through fiction. Therefore, the only thing that makes the novel realistic is “themselves,” and novelists never refuse to travel to their innermost shrine.

I am not different from these novelists and tend to see myself both as a narrator and a protagonist in my work. The main characters in my stories are usually novelists and yoga instructors (just like the protagonist Garp in the novel *The World According to Garp* by John Irving, is a wrestler just like the author). Plus, I prefer to describe my reality of living as an artist and a part-time instructor through novels. I do not want to create the characters of my novel as celebrities, doctors, or astronauts just to attract attention. Of course, I can show a fancy and fantastic world that most ordinary people have never experienced, but I can’t find my feelings and my inner self in those stories. As I have mentioned before, that story would not be a “mirror” to look within.

Therefore, I don’t hesitate to present myself as a character in my work because I like to share my inner feelings with people—and the readers are able to discover the reality they have experienced through that character.

The best way for a novel to pursue reality is through the writer, who looks deep inside herself and reveals what she finds. Deep within yourself, you should know there is latent truth and magnificent power of the universe—more than you can ever imagine. Even if ordinary people hesitate to look at it or express it, it is a writer’s job to be vulnerable in looking inward and describe it accurately. It will be both the reality of the novelist and the reality of all of us. When that happens, we may be able to experience the miracle that “my story” becomes “our story.”