

Acceptance Speech for the Manhae Grand Prize for Literature

John Ralston Saul

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To receive the Manhae Grand Prize for Literature is a great personal honour. I also feel it to be an honour for PEN International, the world's oldest and leading freedom of speech organization and the only global literary organization to bring together tens of thousands of writers in over a hundred countries.

I feel that there is a direct link between my first visit to Korea 16 years ago and the ethical core of the Manhae Grand Prize. As some of you know, on my first trip to your country I traveled to Gyeongju and walked out of the city into a deep mountain valley where I saw the house of a great Confucian teacher: Yi Ŏn-chöck. I wrote in my book – *The Unconscious Civilization* – of how this experience made me consider the five Confucian qualities with which he had governed other men in a spirit of humanism. They were Wen, Ren, Chunzi, Li and De. They are the arts of peace; of goodness; of superior behaviour, which is the opposite of the petty and mean; of propriety or grace; and finally, of the just use of power.

As I understand the beliefs and arguments of Han Yong-un, of Manhae, in whose honour this prize is named, they reinforce the same ideas. In other words, there is a strong link between the best of Buddhism and the best of Confucianism. But my argument has always been that Buddhism and Confucianism are at their heart also strongly linked to the humanist tradition in the West.

Which is why receiving this wonderful prize reinforces not only the intellectual but also the ethical forces to which I have always devoted my writing.

And now, I can add, as President of PEN International, that the Manhae Grand Prize reinforces the ideas shared by PEN writers around the world.

You are fortunate in Korea to have a particularly strong PEN Centre. And for the second time in the 88 year history of PEN International, you will be receiving hundreds of writers from around the world in 2012. The atmosphere around the Seoul Congress of 1988 was one of violence, instability and of free expression being at risk. Now things are quite different. But the world in general is slipping towards an era of growing threats to free expression. Around the world those of us less at risk have a growing obligation to stand up for those in danger. I know that the 2012 Seoul congress of PEN will be a moment to face those threats and advance ideas such as those put forward by Han Yong-un and Yi Ŏn-chöck.

Let me add that the reason writers belong to PEN is not because we receive anything from it, but because as those who are first heard in public debate, it falls naturally to us to be both the advocates of freedom of expression and the victims of any limitations on freedom of expression. And so, we belong to PEN in order to advance and defend the freedom of expression that belongs to everybody, writer and reader; speaker and listener.

Freedom of expression is not a technicality. It is a way of imagining society and it is a way of imagining the relationship between peoples. Of course freedom of expression is an argument against classic, old-fashioned censorship. But it is also an argument in favour of multilingualism and the growth of minority cultures.

When I wrote my book, *The Collapse of Globalism*, some people saw it as a comment on economic theory. But for me it was a way of arguing that economics must be subjected to culture in its broadest sense; that civilization requires economics, but economics only works if it is driven by the public good. And my arguments in books such as *Voltaire's Bastards* and *On Equilibrium* were all about finding a contemporary way to demote utilitarian ideas of self-interest – such as those represented in contemporary economics – in order to reveal international ideas of humanism; ideas which remind us that the heart of philosophy in every civilization lies in our capacity to imagine The Other; that is, both to imagine our integrated relationship with the place in which we live – the physical world in its broadest and narrowest sense - and to imagine the millions of people we do not

know and will never know. If we can imagine their situation, we can imagine shared justice.

Tomorrow morning I will be going, at the invitation of Lee Dong-Kun, today's winner of the Manhae Peace Prize, and 15th descendant of Yi Ŏn-chöck, to once again visit the house of that great philosopher in the village of Yangdong near Kyeongju. I am very moved at the thought of being in the villages of two such ethical men in a single week.

I know that the idea of imagining The Other lies deep within the philosophy of Han Yong-un. And so I accept the Manhae Grand Prize with humility in the shadow of this humanist philosophy.

In his poem "To The Readers", Han Yong-un spoke for me today:

'To read my poems then might well be like rubbing a bit of
Dry chrysanthemum in your fingers and holding them
Up to your nose in a flowering glade in late spring.
I don't know how far the night has advanced
As the darkness thins in Mt. Sorak
I wait for the bell of a dawning day as I put my brush
Aside.'

Kamsahamnida