

October 19, 2005

Cheryl's notes on 1:30 meeting—student Seung Cho, Lucinda Roy, Cheryl Ruggiero

*[I am struck immediately by Seung Cho's physical aspect—he has a choice of seating, the chair opposite mine close to Lucinda's desk or the sofa, and he chooses the sofa, as far as possible from either of us—understandable. When I'm introduced and shake his hand, his hand is very sweaty and remains straight, does not clasp my hand.*

*When he sits, his arms are splayed unnaturally down at his sides, on the armrest and a pillow, open, stiff, hands not resting on the surfaces. He hardly moves at all, his face or his body, either when listening or speaking.*

*He wears a baseball cap pulled very low and reflective sunglasses. His voice is so very low that it's difficult to hear. Throughout, Cho's responses come more slowly than in a normal conversation, and most are monosyllables—“no, yeah, sure.” I've indicated some places where there are even more strikingly long pauses before he responds.*

*I missed some comments, certainly. Lucinda repeated some things several times, especially about what the independent study option could be like. Her tone was friendly and encouraging throughout.]*

L: asks, referring to an earlier exchange, if he really thought she was going to “yell at” him, that she certainly wasn't going to.

Cho: *[noncommittal, gesture, not quite a shrug]*

L: says “you probably know why you've been asked to come today,” asks about the piece he read in class

Cho: says it was a joke, satire

L: suggests it may be like Swift's “A Modest Proposal” ?

Cho: agrees

L: asks about Cho's taking photos of the students in the class

Cho: says it is “just a hobby,” that he takes pictures of “trees, sky . . .”

L: explains that taking unauthorized photographs, without permission from the subjects, and especially publishing them on a website, is something the University is taking very seriously, and that it could be something that could get a student into trouble, and she wouldn't want that to happen to Seung, asks if Seung understands

Cho: “yeah”

L: asks whether Seung was offended by the class discussion on eating animals

Cho: “I wasn't offended. I was just making fun of it . . . thought it was funny, thought I'd make fun of it.”

L: asks if he is a vegetarian

Cho: no

L: asks if he has religious beliefs about eating meat or animals

Cho: no

L: asks if he is finding the class helpful, if he'd rather be taking another class

Cho: says when things are assigned, like a poem, “I do it”

L: notes that the assignment was to be on dogs, asks if the piece was relevant to the assignment

Cho: Professor Giovanni “says we can write on anything—“ the assignments are just to help get started . . .

L; proposes alternative of working independently with herself and Fred D’Aguiar

Cho: doesn’t want to lose credits . . . if not “kicked out” will stay *[I noted some emotion on the words “kicked out,” a small spark of anger or resentment]*

*[At this point, Lucinda asks if he’d remove his sunglasses. She makes a bit of a joke of it, about not wanting to go on seeing her own reflection. Cho takes a long time to respond, but he does remove them. It is a very distressing sight, since his face seems very naked and blank without them. It’s a great relief to be able to read his face, though there isn’t much there. Lucinda asks if taking off the sunglasses has been terrible for him. He shakes his head.]*

L: says he doesn’t seem like himself, like the student she knew in the Intro to Poetry class, and she asks if anything terrible or bad has happened to him

Cho: *[waits a long time to answer, but says]* “no”

*[I lost track of Lucinda’s next question]*

Cho: “No—I’m just, like, real quiet and shy.”

L: “So giving a presentation or something would be like torture for you?”

Cho: no

L: Or working one-on-one, say with someone like me, maybe that would be hard for you?

Cho: no

L: explains a choice to (1) stay in the class, explain to students that the piece was satire, assure the students that he will not take any more pictures of them, or (2) work independently with herself and Fred—what does he want to do?

Cho: takes a long time to answer, says “I don’t know.” Asks if it’s OK for him to think about it.

L: says yes, certainly, asks him to email her with a decision by Friday, since there’s no class tomorrow (Thursday)

Cho: indicates OK—just barely audible

L: asks how his grades in the class are going

Cho: says he hasn’t really gotten any yet

L: asks what he wants to do . . . he’d said he was writing a novel . . . writing?

Cho: takes a while to answer, says “Write. It’s the only thing I really . . . “ *[trailed off to inaudible]*

L: mainly fiction?

Cho: “I started out writing poems” started writing fiction later

L: asks about the Jeff Herman book [on publishers and agents] she’d recommended back in the poetry class

Cho: says he did get it

L: says that if he chooses to work independently, she and Cho can work on that aspect of writing, too, publishing, agents, etc.

*[Cho is a little more animated for a moment or so while Lucinda is saying this]*

L: “Have you ever worked with a counselor? Would you be comfortable doing that?” says shyness can sometimes develop to become overwhelming, can get in the way . . .

Cho: no answer

L: continues a little asking again whether he would consider talking with a counselor

Cho: *[long wait, seems just a little more open, more unhappy, if possible, but then says]* “I don’t know.”

L: says she has the name of someone, and she’ll send it to him, asks “Would you consider going?”

Cho: *[long wait, very quiet response, very neutral]* “Sure.”

L: “Are you happy here, at Virginia Tech?”

Cho: *[long wait, very neutral]* “Sure”

L: “What is it that makes you happy?”

Cho: *[long wait]* “Not sure.”

L: “Do you have a lot of friends?”

Cho: no response

L: “You have some friends? People close to you?”

Cho: says he has some friends from around where he lives *[I couldn’t hear all of what he said, couldn’t tell whether he said dorm or apartment or something else.]*

L: “Do you have brothers and sisters?”

Cho; “sister”

L: “Is she in school here?”

Cho: “no”

L: “Is she working?”

Cho: “Yes”

L: “What does she do?”

Cho: *[takes some time]* “Not sure.” *[pause]* says the sister works somewhere around DC.

L: asks about family, where they are from

Cho: says they live in DC

L: asks if they came from someplace else before

Cho: from Seoul

L: asks when they came to this country, how old Seung was, middle school?

Cho: 12 years ago—he was in elementary school

L: shares a little about difficulties she experienced immigrating from Britain, asks if it was tough for Seung to adjust

Cho: says yeah, it was a little tough

. . . *[some comments I didn’t write down]*

L: asks if he is or was very angry with other students in the class

Cho: “No—why would I be angry?” says he doesn’t see anger in what he wrote

L: reads some passages from the piece, asks if he can see why other students might have seen it as angry

Cho: says he can see anger in it

L: speaks again about the counselor, says she will send the information, reaffirms that she hopes to hear from him by Friday, and that it could be very nice working together, that she felt they worked well together in the previous class, that no one will kick him out of the class, that it’s up to him, some benefits of working independently . . . and maybe they’ve talked enough for now.

*[Cho stands up and is collecting his things.]*

L: also stands to walk to the door, asks in a friendly way, “You don’t feel as if you’ve been yelled at here today, I hope?”

Cho: indicates no

L: says good-bye, hoping to hear from him by Friday

*[Cho leaves. Lucinda decides to follow him and give him her book Hotel Alleluia as a gift.*

*When she comes back, she says that when she spoke with him in the hall, he seemed near tears and his hand, when they shook hands, was trembling, and that his hand remained straight, did not grasp hers.]*