

**Address by the winner of the Yasnaya Polyana Prize in the Foreign Literature category, Juhea Kim, to the Russian readers**

I would like to begin by offering my congratulations to my fellow Korean author Han Kang, who was shortlisted for Yasnaya Polyana previously, and who has just won the Nobel Prize. Today seems to be an incredible day for Korean literature, and I am also honored to be receiving this great prize, which happens to mean more to me personally than any other.

On a snowy day about nine years ago in New York, I began writing a novel. I was very poor and faced with all kinds of deprivations; but while writing, I forgot about hunger because literature felt more real and important to me than reality. If someone had told me then that I would now be standing before you, receiving this extraordinary honor, I wouldn't have believed them.

I don't think it's possible to create art honestly without giving up one's vitality and life force, and much of my own life force went into *Beasts of a Little Land*. Yet this award is so meaningful to me that I know it will fill my cup for the rest of my life. As a young reader in Korea, I was nourished by translated Russian literature. As I grew up in America, I found inspiration and succor with Bulgakov, Chekhov, Gogol, Akhmatova, and Dostoevsky—artists with distinctly individual voices, yet somehow, in my mind, united by profound spirituality and soulfulness that I came to regard as a Russian quality.

They spoke to me more than the canonical writers closer to home. This wasn't just because I preferred the aesthetics of Russian literature, its digressions, perspectives by turns panoramic and intimate, its lushly musical yet logical phrasings. It was because literature is an aesthetic expression of a philosophy, and the Russian understanding of the human experience resonated with me.

In particular, I found unsurpassed inspiration and guiding light in Leo Tolstoy. While writing *Beasts of a Little Land*, I would sometimes open my well-worn copy of *Anna Karenina* to any page and transcribe passages by hand. It restored rhythm to my prose and gave me confidence and even joy that, despite my struggles, I was part of the great river of literature, with my hero somewhere nearer the source.

But it wasn't just his lyricism that influenced me; I learned what kind of artist I wanted to be from his humanitarianism upholding the dignity of all living beings. His compassion for humans and animals, call for peace, vegetarianism, and faith have shaped who I am as a writer and a human being.

On the subject of animals, I want to say a few words about Siberian tigers and Amur leopards, two endangered species that currently only live in Russia and China. They once flourished in the Korean peninsula but were extirpated there a century ago. I have been donating a portion of the proceeds of *Beasts of a Little Land* to their conservation since 2021.

These animals hold a spiritual significance to the Korean people, and we have been involved in their protection across the borders as much as possible. What gives me hope is that the tigers and the leopards continue to not care about manmade borders and restrictions; despite vehicle collisions, fences, and other dangers, they keep trying to migrate back to their ancestral home in the Korean peninsula. This is ecologically necessary for the survival of these species, especially the leopard.

But as a writer I can't help but see poetry in the resilience and innocence of nature. I hope to contribute in my small way to their long-hoped-for return by donating the entire prize money to their conservation; and I hope Koreans and Russians can continue collaborating on this as we have done for many years.

Finally to the Yasnaya Polyana Museum-Estate, the chairman and other members of the jury, Kirill Batygin, Maria Osetrova, Anna Semida, everyone at Inspira, to Samsung for their philanthropy and leadership, to my parents and to my husband, I extend my deepest gratitude. Spasiba.