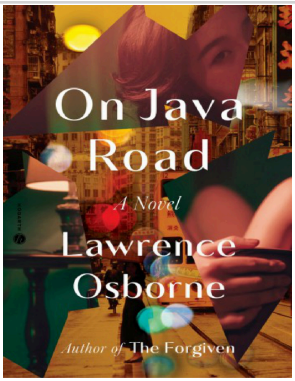
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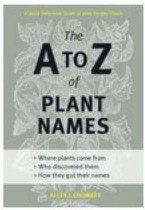
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Recommended Course Materials & Supplementary Reference Resources

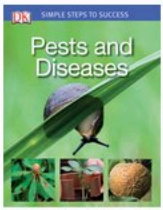
Please note: Below are recommended reference materials that accompany this subject. Scan the QR code next to any title to view syllabus details.



Spons Architects and Builders Price Book 2022 (Spons Price Books), 147th Edition (AECOM)



The A to Z of Plant Names A Quick Reference Guide to 4000 Garden Plants (Allen J. Coombes)



Simple Steps to Success Pests and Diseases (DK Publishing)



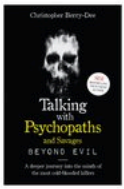
Soils Laboratory Manual, K-State Edition (Colby J. Moorberg, David A. Crouse)



One by One (Ruth Ware)



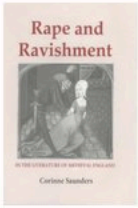
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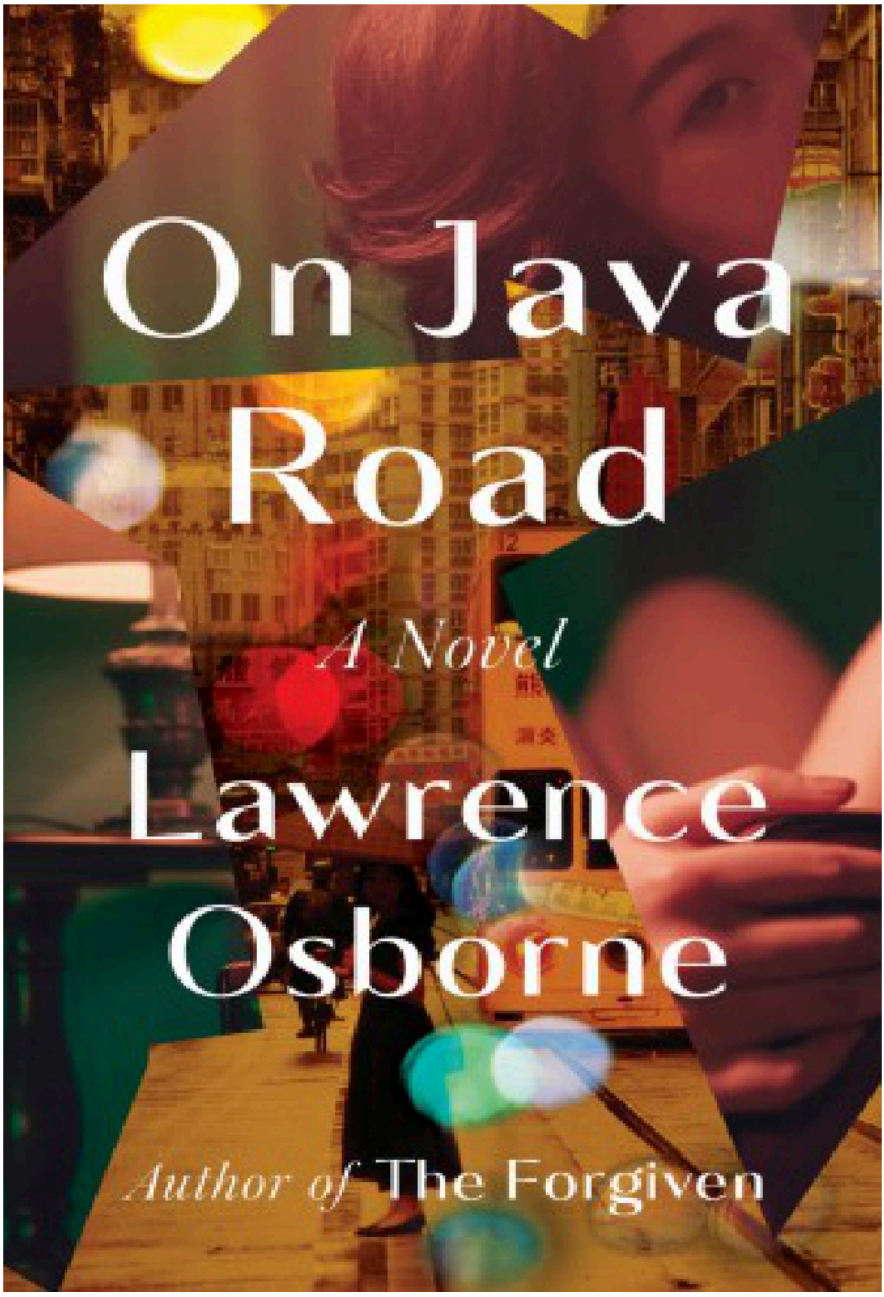
Talking with psychopaths and savages beyond evil (Berry-Dee, Christopher)



The Art of Intuition Cultivating Your Inner Wisdom (Sophy Burnham)



Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England (Corinne Saunders)


On Java Road
A Novel
Lawrence Osborne
Author of The Forgiven

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Dedication
Also by Lawrence Osborne
About the Author

THOUGHT, IN THOSE DESPERATE AND forgotten days, of that passage in
vel I had read in school where the narrator insists that he prefers
known as a reporter rather than as a journalist, the humbler wo
tter denoting what he does, namely transcribing what he see
day it's an even less dishonorable job description. I knew all t
urnalists in Hong Kong, of course, but I also knew a fair number
e reporters—the citizens trailing the city's movable war zones, oft
e me all alone with a phone camera, and over time I had beco
ore comfortable among them without consciously knowing why. B
en what were we describing and for whom? I wasn't sure about th
ther. For myself, perhaps, and a few others scattered across t
obe, such as I liked to imagine them, it would depend how deep y
anted to go into yourself. Some of these reporters had beco
rangely famous.

They were unlike me in that respect. Although I had been in Ho
ng for more than twenty years, slaving away as a reporter factotu
adually persevering his way into higher echelons of respectability,
d never made a name for myself in my adopted city. People kne
e vaguely as a writer of something or other, and a fairly infamo
utton, but little more than that. I had gone there when still a you
an, chilled to the marrow by London and its prospects and, mo
portant, unable to see myself succeeding in that tomb of a city.
d arrived in Hong Kong just after the Handover, knowing nobo
cept my old university friend Jimmy Tang, and equipped only wi
single suitcase and savings of five thousand sterling. I had done w
ven those inauspicious beginnings, but I had never become a st
riter. And in a way I didn't mind at all. I had worked for a variety
wspapers, enjoyed a stint as a restaurant critic, married a
vorced, accumulated a small apartment, and perfected the Chinese
d studied at university. In other words, I was an excellent nonentit

—

IN FACT, AT THE beginning of that summer, when the disturbances h
st erupted, I felt as though I were being woken from a deep a
eaningless sleep. The city I had grown so used to—comfortabl
nical, overflowing with wine dinners and white-truffle events—w
attered the first moment I saw one of my neighbors wander on
va Road at midnight in a white sleeveless shirt wielding a butche
ife. I knew the man by face if not by name because I saw him eve
her day at Fung Shing, the restaurant on that same Java Road whe

Later, it was true, certain expatriated foreigners would inde come local heroes in the conflict that consumed the city th mmer, like the Frenchman with no legs who declared his solidari ith the students while standing precariously on his prostheses a ating to thrilling effect. I never found out his name, though I w solved to buy him a drink if I ever saw him eating alone in a che staurant. He was known merely as the Frenchman with No Legs. r the fellow knife-wielding diner at Fung Shing, I never knew h me either, but he would reappear like the ghost in a folktale, nev sing his power to disquiet.

He was one of the countless Fujianese immigrants concentrated orth Point, the neighborhood where I lived, which had long been stion of pro-Beijing nationalist sentiment. Still speaking Mandar stead of Cantonese, they were an island among the sea of Ho ngers who otherwise barely noticed them. Their moment ndicating the Motherland had come, and when they achieved critic ass—as for example at Fung Shing at about 9 p.m.—they acquired lligerent confidence even as they were huddled around pots of t d after-dinner doughnuts, a delicacy carried from table to table gary trays after the main courses had been served. Since th garded foreigners with suspicion at the best of times, and no sociated us with the demonic prospect of democracy, I wondered ey, and he, were now my enemy. And even if they had drawn ood from me personally, how should I report and describe the is question made me want to eat at Fung Shing every single nig sides, the very name in English, Phoenix City, now seemed mo posite than it had before. Another phoenix, another riddle.

Every time I climbed up the staircase to the second-floor eater hich was level with its red-and-blue street sign, past a regal go age of the bird equipped with a blue electric eye, I wondered if es would be upon me as I entered the main room alone, dazzled e overhead interrogation lights the Chinese seem to love in the staurants, and which made me even more aware than usual of forgivable foreignness. I decided to call the Unknown Meat Cleav an Mr. Li, since that is one of the most common surnames on t ainland. If I were to ever meet him again in a dark street in tho rts I wanted my assassin to have a name. *Cloven in twain by Mr. Li* rely saw him at Fung Shing after that hot night of bastinadoes a sorder, men running after boys and girls in black with bamb

ound me sharpened, a language that I had never mastered in a se. Yet I detected these changes like magnetic alterations in t rwaves.

I knew how to say "fuck your mother," *diao ni lao mu,* but now ard it made into a sentence directed at the armored cops: *diao ni l u gao gun,* where the last two words could be rendered as "d cer." The phrase *hak ging* was everywhere—dirty cops, black cop e cops were soon shouting obscenities back at their satirists. So them said it in Mandarin. *Cao ni mao.* Over the warmer months t nsions that had begun with protests against an extradition la posed by Beijing had escalated and spiraled out of control. Now, became more irrational, more primal, one could see a hatr erating through words as much as through beatings and tear ga ords are the most efficient vessel for carrying the seeds of violenc e tongue contains no bones, as the Arabs say, yet it breaks bone erything in the depths of the mind flows effortlessly through bon attering words. When a cop says to a sixteen-year-old girl *sei bat* "die, bitch"—the violence is already performed. A verb is not an a t it is the prelude to one, a permission the violator has granted mself by uttering the obscenity. Once during a standoff the poli ed a formal warning and the girls on the front line cried bac ome here and we'll scratch your balls off." To which there was swer. In that moment at least, the verbal insult nullified even rrage of rubber bullets.

For the next few days I didn't go to the daily street protests. I we Phoenix City as usual because I relished the arctic air-conditioni d the feeling of normalcy it bestowed on its patrons. It was a reli sat there by one of the mirrored columns and ate salted duck yol d soupy dumplings until the street had cooled a little, and I cou down again of sane mind and walk around the sloped streets th n up from Java Road in search of rioters, protestors—call them wh u will. But none appeared. A lull had descended, as if the student ith their last wills and testaments sewn inside their jackets, h cided to take a few days off to recuperate, allowing the streets turn to being places of consumerist ease. Or, in the case of Ja ad, a place of funeral homes filled with black bunting a onochrome banners haunted by the ghosts of the sugar magnat ho had once made their fortunes on the maritime trade with Jav d whose imposing offices once stood here as a symbol of coloni

ere, the interval of ordinariness was impressive in its potency. T nks with their mulberry sails, the lights of the Kerry Hotel across t ater coming on at dusk, the ferries packed with miserable perspire aring fans, and the edges of the mountains a color of old tea at t d of daylight. It was around this time that bodies had begun pear in those same waters, quietly retrieved by police boats th porters were not permitted to approach, the first intimations of w form of intimidation, a new configuration of the chessboard.

I sometimes retreated into the Vic, which was popular wi iddle-class mainlanders and since renamed, and went up to t mnambulant bar on the roof to watch the sunsets. I even broug y trunks on occasion and took an illegal dip in the hotel pool amo e slightly nervous couples from the other side of the border. ppose it was a matter of anywhere *but* my stifling little apartment e Garland. Yet I was never lonelier than when I was in my o ighborhood and nowhere was more lonely than the top of the V otel as night came down.

—

IT WAS THERE THAT I used to think of Jimmy Tang and the days ma ars before when we had studied together at Clare Colleg mbridge, and, among other things, had worked together in o are time on a translation of Li Po's "The Exile's Letter." It was one e most famous Chinese poems of the Tang period, perhaps the mo mous, erratically translated by Ezra Pound, and our desire bark on a new version was inspired by the fact that Pound hims d not been able to speak a word of Chinese. We found this amusin not preposterous. He had merely used the notes of the Americ holar Ernest Fenollosa. And yet, Jimmy used to say, h terpretations were almost as haunting as the original. Beyond th s translations of Li Po had introduced Chinese poetry to Weste aders for the first time. How could it be? Pound had, howeve vented the title for English-readers, as well as turning the poe rrect name—Li Bai—into "Li Po." The original was "Rememberi ur Excursion in the Past: A Letter Sent to Commissary Yen of Ch' unty."

Jimmy was a scion of one of Hong Kong's wealthiest families, an as a scholarship boy from a small town no one has ever heard of. B ing at university together had made us equals. Now, more or less arter of a century later, we were friends again in the very differe

med with life's gifts. Even then, among only a handful of peop udying Chinese in that medieval university, we had shared so nd of mental territory that was invisible to other people. Tenuousl e still did.

I recall a morning in October when we had just started our fir rm: I caught sight of him crossing the college court. Only eighteen, tle younger than myself, he was walking in cricket whites with inese girl toward the river, his shoulders draped in a cable sweate aving behind him a strange trail of water drops on the paving. Th oked as if they were drenched from head to foot, as if they had be r a swim in the very river they were now walking toward. Alone in tle cell, I was the friendless provincial state-school boy studyi inese because it was exquisitely unfashionable but, to me at lea so a seductively unattainable subject. And it wouldn't be aggeration to say that this couple trailing drops and holding han the shadows of the Clare court were unlike anyone else that I h er encountered.

Later that term, after we had become acquaintances, Jimmy ga e a copy of Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler,* which his father ong Kong had in turn given to him when he was fourteen. There as the observation, well known to anglers over the centuries, abo e sadistic use of frogs as bait: "Use him as though you loved hi at is, harm him as little as you may possibly, that he may live t nger."

You could see why a ruthless billionaire father would give such ok to his son, and why Jimmy would carry it around with him as ent to study among England's lazy elite. At the time, however, mply said that it was the wisest book he could imagine for learni w to live, since life really was like fishing. It required patienc nning, and an ability to sit still for long periods, paying attention moving waters. It encouraged a taste for quiet killing. *The Comple gler*'s other advantage was that no one else in Hong Kong had ev ad it. It was secret knowledge, a manual of guile and persuasio tterly, I never mentioned that book to him because it felt like ghtly precious affectation on the part of Tang father and son. ondered if he still thumbed through it at critical moments.

When you look back on who you were when you were eightee st before the corruption sets in, you're bound to make a small a convincing monument out of it that shines only during restle

hat would he say to you?

When I looked back it was obvious why we had become friends are. Neither of us belonged in that environment. The trappings e English upper classes were not ours. Jimmy already had h sition in the wider world because, although he came from a colon was a rich and vital one. It was I who was the peasant. A peasa ho had learned to turn verbs in Chinese, but a peasant nonetheless.

I like to think he felt sorry for me; maybe he did. Or else I was t og with a hook in its mouth and he was the one harming me as litt possible. I would see him every day at lectures and in Mandar asses and, as is the way with students, it only took a couple of wee fore we were on nodding and then speaking terms. By Christmas st year we were going to the Eagle every evening, or Waffles tzroy Street, or the Indian next to New Hall, and he had assum er me the senior position—better clothes, better hair, mo ending power, and more literary candlepower. It was the head sta at the rich always enjoy. Fast out of the blocks, they can tpaced only later in life, when it's usually too late. I calculate that ves them a fifteen-year advantage, which is the span of time need at least draw level with them. By contrast, they often burn o rly. If you surpass them later in life they will always complain th eir early advantage was, in reality, a handicap. Jimmy, howeve ould never suffer that disillusion. Although his father already had h ture mapped out to the last detail, Jimmy told me that he'd declar the patriarch even before he had left for Cambridge that he h cided to become a scholar of Tang poetry—and there was nothi s vile clan could do to stop him. "They're all psychopaths a endthrifts anyway," he said to me, as if I were the only person hom he would ever say such things, though he later repeated the sessively in Hong Kong. "I have an uncle who has a different car f ery day of the week. Color coded. My grandfather made his mon the gambling dens in the '40s. They were racketeers from Shangh at's all. It's what I am, too, if you look hard enough."

He was fond of reminding me that the first British cemeteries ong Kong specifically excluded the Chinese dead. "But you let us entually—as corpses." His English, acquired at the Diocesan Boy hool on Argyle Street in Hong Kong, was faultless and almo ithout accent. He never talked about his years at Millfield scho ter on, and I learned never to ask him about them. He was mo