

A Theatre of Conscience
Alan Clements on *Conversation with a Dictator*
A Literary Manifesto and A Global Invitation

On June 19th, 2025, Aung San Suu Kyi—Nobel Peace Laureate, elected leader of Myanmar, and icon of nonviolent resistance—turns 80 years old as she enters her fifth year of solitary confinement. No letters. No photographs. No public trace. Her well-being is unknown.

This silencing—both personal and political—is the foundation upon which *Conversation with a Dictator* was born.

Authored by Alan Clements—an investigative journalist, former Buddhist monk in Myanmar, and internationally acclaimed writer—the book is not just a novel. It is a literary confrontation with tyranny, a philosophical inquiry into the architecture of authoritarianism, and a visual, poetic, and spiritual act of resistance.

A LITERARY FEATURE FILM FOR THE CONSCIENCE

An Interview with Alan Clements, Author of *Conversation with a Dictator*

INTERVIEWER: Alan, *Conversation with a Dictator* is unlike any book I've read—a fusion of literature, theatre, testimony, and visual art. It's built around a fictional dialogue between you, as a journalist, and Myanmar's Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. What was the spark?

ALAN CLEMENTS: The silence. The disappearance of truth. The international forgetting of Burma.

After the 2021 coup, Myanmar's elected leaders were arrested, the media muzzled, civil society crushed. Aung San Suu Kyi—Nobel Laureate, icon of nonviolence—was placed in solitary confinement. No photos. No letters. No verified contact. Her voice was completely erased.

And the world moved on.

I couldn't. I wouldn't. This book was my answer to that silence. A way of speaking what cannot be said inside Myanmar. A way to confront tyranny at the root—not just militarily, not just politically, but psychologically and spiritually.

INTERVIEWER: The result is a five-act dialogue with the dictator. But it doesn't read like traditional political fiction or even a play—it's theatrical, poetic, surreal at times. How do you describe it?

CLEMENTS: It's not a conventional dialogue—it's a reckoning. A ritual. A truth-exorcism in five acts.

The atmosphere is raw, dreamlike, psychologically charged. The reader doesn't just hear what the dictator says—they descend into the machinery of his psyche. The format is part theatre, part inner monologue, part cross-examination by conscience itself.

And truthfully, the dialogue could easily be read as the dictator's own subconscious speaking to himself. It's naked. It's nightmarish. A final attempt to justify the unjustifiable. To avoid the inevitable collapse of the delusion.

INTERVIEWER: You mean the entire structure could be read as a man on the edge, interrogating his own ruin?

CLEMENTS: Exactly. The “journalist” may just be the last flicker of the dictator’s repressed conscience. The entire book could be the mind of tyranny unraveling in real time.

Every line he speaks is a mask slipping. Every question asked is a wound being touched. There’s nowhere to hide in this kind of conversation—not for him, not for us.

INTERVIEWER: The book features over 300 illustrations—stark, haunting, symbolically rich. Why was that important?

CLEMENTS: Because dictatorship is not just an ideology—it’s an atmosphere. It’s a distortion of meaning, a manipulation of memory, a spiritual suffocation. Words can describe these things, but images can reveal them.

The visuals in the book are not there to illustrate the plot. They’re there to embody emotional states. One might show a child fading into ash amid a burning village. Another reveals a prison of silence, where the prisoners don’t speak but are interlocked in mutual stillness. Another—perhaps the most disturbing—depicts the mind of the dictator: a self-replicating cathedral of delusion, hollow and vast, echoing with its own fear.

And then there’s Aung San Suu Kyi—who appears in image, but never speaks. She emerges as lotus, as shadow, as defiance itself. The visuals are not just aesthetic—they’re ethical. They form a parallel narrative that bypasses intellect and strikes the conscience directly.

INTERVIEWER: You’ve said this book isn’t entertainment, but art as activism. Can you elaborate on that?

CLEMENTS: Yes, absolutely. Art, at its best, doesn’t just reflect reality—it reshapes our relationship to it.

From the beginning, I saw this book not as a means of escape, but of engagement. A way to confront the brutal architecture of repression not with bombs or slogans, but with language sharpened by truth, and imagery that disturbs, reveals, and haunts.

I believe in the redemptive potential of literature—not as an opiate, but as a mirror and a sword. *Conversation with a Dictator* is my offering to that tradition. A confrontation wrapped in beauty. A defiance encoded in poetry. A rebellion against the normalization of lies, against the cowardice of neutrality, against the dangerous myth that power and justice are synonymous.

And while the setting is Burma, the message is unmistakably global. From China's digital authoritarianism to the rise of theocratic control worldwide, and the algorithmic suppression of dissent—the spirit of dictatorship is everywhere. It infiltrates our language. It distorts truth. It numbs the conscience through spectacle and distraction. This book seeks to name it, expose it, and begin to disarm it—starting in the only realm tyrants can never fully possess: the imagination.

So no, this isn't entertainment. It's art as activism. It's literature as invocation. A call to awaken conscience in a world increasingly anesthetized to suffering—and to remember that the fiercest form of resistance may be choosing to see clearly and still refusing to turn away.

INTERVIEWER: You were once a Buddhist monk in Myanmar. How does that spiritual past shape your political and artistic work now?

CLEMENTS: Completely. I spent several years at the Mahasi Meditation Centre in Rangoon, training in mindfulness and insight meditation under the late Mahasi Sayadaw and his successor, Sayadaw U Pandita. That training taught me something profound: that seeing clearly is not passive—it's dangerous. It demands moral courage.

In that sense, mindfulness isn't just a tool for self-awareness—it's a form of resistance. To witness suffering without turning away is a revolutionary act. That experience instilled in me a lifelong understanding of the intersection between consciousness and power—how unexamined fear metastasizes into violence, and how self-deception becomes institutionalized as policy.

This book is written from that lens. It's not simply a political critique—it's an existential inquiry into the mind of tyranny. What does power look like when it has severed its connection to empathy? What happens when ideology becomes a refuge from truth? These are spiritual questions. And the answers, I believe, must be answered not just with policy—but with presence, with courage, and with love.

INTERVIEWER: Aung San Suu Kyi never speaks in the book, but she seems to permeate every page. What was your intention there?

CLEMENTS: Her silence is deliberate—and devastating. And yet, her spirit is everywhere.

She's the absence that refuses to be erased. The dignity that can't be defiled. Her philosophy of nonviolence, her unwavering belief in moral courage, her clarity under duress—all of that stands as the counterforce to the General's unraveling.

But I also wanted her presence to mirror what's happening in real life. Right now, as we speak, she is held incommunicado. No access to the press. No letters. No verified images. She has been functionally erased. And this book is my resistance to that erasure.

I wanted the reader to feel her presence without ever needing her words. (Although I did write a fictional foreword in my idea of her words.) To understand that leadership is not always loud, that resilience can be silent, and that the spirit of a people cannot be disappeared—no matter how violently it is suppressed.

INTERVIEWER: You've dedicated this book not just to her, but to the over 21,000 political prisoners in Myanmar. What does their presence mean to this work?

CLEMENTS: Everything. They are the soul of this book.

Every sentence I wrote, every image I shaped, was done with them in mind. These are people who have risked—and in many cases, lost—everything simply for believing in something better. Students, poets, monks, children, farmers, mothers. These are not terrorists. They are teachers of freedom, enduring the cruelest punishments simply for being awake.

When I write in the voice of the journalist—or perhaps the voice of conscience—I imagine that I am speaking for them. Or rather, with them. And when I imagine the dictator speaking, I feel the crushing weight of their silence pressing against every one of his lies.

This book is not a monument—it's a mouthpiece. A witness. A living prayer that those voices will one day rise again.

INTERVIEWER: Final question. If you could say one thing to the world through this book, what would it be?

CLEMENTS: That dictatorship is not invincible. That truth cannot be indefinitely suppressed. And that the human spirit, even when silenced, continues to speak through art, through memory, through courage.

This book is not a passive experience. It is, in its very design, a literary feature film to be felt in the most visceral way—a descent into the emotionality of the moment, a deep immersion in the psychological reality of repression and the moral clarity of resistance. It's not something you merely read. You enter it. You absorb it. You endure it.

Conversation with a Dictator is ultimately a reminder: the pen still matters. The voice still matters. And in an age of growing repression and algorithmic amnesia, choosing to speak—to remember—is an act of sacred defiance.

Let this book be read in prisons, in classrooms, in revolutions yet to come. Let it be proof that someone saw clearly, and chose not to look away.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Clements was one of the first Westerners ordained as a Buddhist monk in Myanmar under the Mahasi Sayadaw tradition. Expelled for his outspoken resistance to the military regime, he went on to document Burma's freedom movement alongside Aung San Suu Kyi—most notably co-authoring *The Voice of Hope*, translated into over a dozen languages.

His previous books include *Burma: The Next Killing Fields? A Future to Believe In*, and *Instinct for Freedom*. His writings have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *TIME*, *Newsweek*, and more, earning praise from global moral leaders such as the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Vandana Shiva.

Conversation with a Dictator is his boldest work to date—a literary exorcism of tyranny, and a sacred offering to those silenced by authoritarian regimes around the world.

A GLOBAL INVITATION TO SPEAK OUT

In honor of Aung San Suu Kyi's 80th birthday—and in remembrance of the 21,000 political prisoners still detained across Myanmar—we are extending a humble, urgent invitation:

If you feel moved by this work, we would be deeply honored to include a brief endorsement from you—just a sentence or two—for our international press release and for prominent display on the book's main pages across global booksellers.

Your voice has the power to amplify the very message this regime fears: that truth cannot be buried, and conscience cannot be killed.

FINAL WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

“This book is not entertainment.

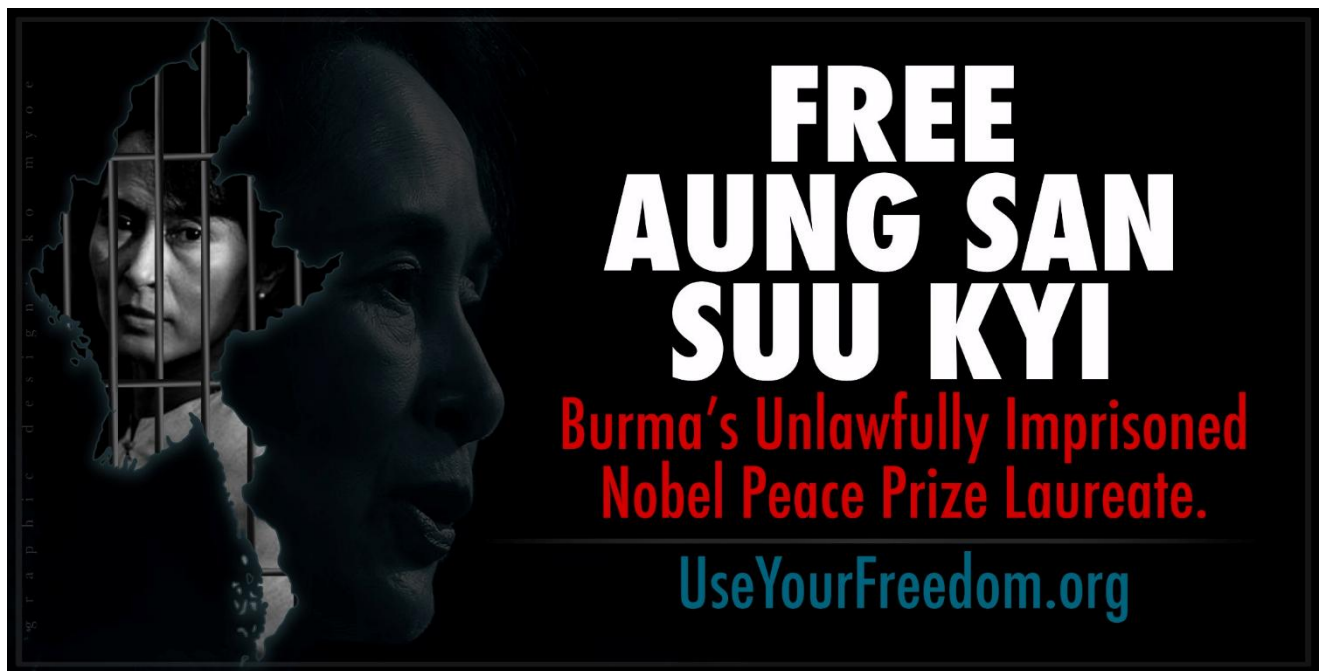
It is a confrontation.

A mirror held to power until it can no longer look away.

Though born of Burma, it belongs to us all.

Because the architecture of tyranny is everywhere.

And because the antidote—conscience—must be spoken, not silenced.”





CONVERSATION WITH A DICTATOR

A Challenge to the Authoritarian Assault

*A Fictional Dialogue with Myanmar's
Senior General*



AN ILLUSTRATED NOVEL
ART AS ACTIVISM

"The world will not be destroyed by those
who do evil, but by those who watch them
without doing anything to stop them."

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

Alan Clements

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