

Everything's an Argument

Andrea A. Lunsford and John J. Ruszkiewicz

with **WRITING RESPONSIBLY**

Loyola University Chicago | Department of English

2017–2018

with Selected Chapters from

Killing Rage

Citizen: An American Lyric

AIDS and its Metaphors

Fences and Windows

No Impact Man

The Bill McKibben Reader

Malcolm X: A Graphic Biography



macmillan learning
curriculum solutions

Writing Responsibly
General Editor, Sherrie Weller
Copyright © 2017 by the Writing Program, Loyola University Chicago

“Refusing to be a Victim,” from *Killing Rage*
bell hooks
Copyright © 1995 by Gloria Watkins

“I” from *Citizen: An American Lyric*
Claudia Rankine
Copyright © 2004 by Claudia Rankine

Selections from *AIDS and Its Metaphors*
Susan Sontag
Copyright © 1988, 1989 by Susan Sontag

“Democracy in Shackles,” from *Fences and Windows: Dispatches From the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate*
Naomi Kline
Copyright © 2002 by Naomi Kline

“If Only Pizza Didn’t Come on Paper Plates,” from *No Impact Man*
Colin Beavan
Copyright © 2009 by Colin Beavan

“Maybe We Should Call It Something Scarier,” from *The Bill McKibben Reader*
Edited by Bill McKibben
Copyright © 2008 by Bill McKibben

“A New Leader,” from *Malcolm X: A Graphic Biography*
Text by Andrew Helfer, illustrations by Randy DuBurke
Text copyright © 2006 by Andrew J. Helfer
Illustrations copyright © 2006 by Randy DuBurke

Copyright © 2016 by Bedford/St. Martin’s

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, except as may be expressly permitted by the applicable copyright statutes or in writing by the Publisher.

Manufactured in the United States of America

1 0 9 8 7 6
f e d c b a

Macmillan Learning Curriculum Solutions
14903 Pilot Drive
Plymouth, MI 48170
www.macmillanlearning.com

978-1-3191-4714-3

Acknowledgments

Text acknowledgements and copyrights appear at the back of the book on pages XXX-XXX, which constitute an extension of the copyright page. It is a violation of the law to reproduce these selections by any means whatsoever without the written permission of the copyright holder.



bedford/st. martin’s • hayden-mcneil
w.h. freeman • worth publishers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Writing Responsibly	1
1 Writing Responsibly	3
2 Summary	7
3 Analysis	31
4 Synthesis	45
5 Researched Argument	69
6 Library Services at Loyola	115
7 Works Cited	119

Everything's an Argument	121
PART 1. Reading and Understanding Arguments	123
8 Everything Is an Argument	125
9 Arguments Based on Emotion: Pathos	153
10 Arguments Based on Character: Ethos	167
11 Arguments Based on Facts and Reasons: Logos	181
12 Fallacies of Argument	203
13 Rhetorical Analysis	221
PART 2. Writing Arguments	257
14 Structuring Arguments	259
15 Arguments of Fact	295
16 Arguments of Definition	333
17 Evaluations	363
18 Causal Arguments	401
19 Proposals	439



PART 3.	Research and Arguments	479
20	Academic Arguments	481
21	Finding Evidence	519
22	Evaluating Sources	537
23	Using Sources	549
24	Plagiarism and Academic Integrity	571
25	Documenting Sources	583
26	Acknowledgements	625

	Trade Excerpts	629
27	“Refusing to Be a Victim” in <i>Killing Rage</i> by bell hooks	631
28	“I” from <i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> by Claudia Rankine	641
29	Selections from “AIDS and Its Metaphors” in <i>AIDS and its Metaphors</i> by Susan Sontag	647
30	“Democracy in Shackles” in <i>Fences and Windows</i> by Naomi Klein	655
31	“If Only Pizza Didn’t Come on Paper Plates” in <i>No Impact Man</i> by Colin Beavan	659
32	“Maybe We Should Call It Something Scarier” in <i>The Bill McKibben Reader</i> by Bill McKibben	679
33	“A New Leader” in <i>Malcolm X: A Graphic Biography</i> by Andrew Helfer	683
34	Reading Credits	697



Writing Responsibly

UCWR 110

FIFTH EDITION

Loyola University Chicago

General Editor: Sherrie Weller

4

Synthesis

UCWR 110



The term “synthesis” has a number of specific meanings, depending on the disciplinary context of the term. In chemistry, synthesis is the process of combining two or more simple substances to make a more complex one. In psychology, synthesis is the integration of attitudes, traits, and responses into a personality. In philosophy, synthesis reconciles two propositions, the thesis and the antithesis, into a new configuration of meaning. In college writing, synthesis involves combining and integrating ideas from two or more sources to develop a new idea. Synthesis writing is sometimes called *discourse synthesis* or *dialectical thinking*, because the task is to put source texts into dialogue, or conversation, with one another (McGinley 227). In a synthesis paper, the writer discusses how two or more texts can be viewed in the light of an organizing theme, structure, or idea and integrates these perspectives to form a complex conclusion or develop a starting point for further inquiry. Synthesis is one of the most effective operations of learning because it requires a constructive thought process. Through synthesis, new ideas are generated; not only our thoughts but also our thought processes are transformed (McGinley 234).

As a university student, you will be required to synthesize in a variety of assignments. For example, in a paper prompt or an exam question, your instructor might ask you to consider the position of theorist C in relation to the views of theorists A and B. In a research paper, you might discuss several arguments about possible causes of the 2008 financial meltdown and use the evidence and viewpoints in these papers to come to your own conclusions about the cause. You might be asked to consider how two authors from the same literary period exemplify the characteristics of that period and how their works have influenced each other. You could be expected to consolidate and explain data from several experiment results. Here are some prompts that ask for a synthesis response:

Discuss Martin Luther King’s notion of an “unjust law” in the light of the Dalai Lama’s criteria for “great compassion.”

Compare and contrast what Helen Keller, Malcolm X, and Richard Rodriguez have to say about education and identity.

How do you think Robert Reich, Gregory Mantsios, and Fatema Mernissi affect your thinking about class and choice?

Successful synthesis requires mastery of two other writing/thinking processes that we have already described in this text: **summary** and **analysis**. First, the writer must be able to demonstrate an understanding of the source texts by objectively restating those ideas in her own words (summary). The

writer must also demonstrate an understanding of the component parts of the source text arguments and how these components work together as a whole (analysis). Synthesis completes the process of transformation begun by summary (transforming another's ideas into one's own words) and analysis (selecting, organizing, and interpreting the components of another's ideas) by connecting and integrating the ideas of several texts under a common structure to create a new set of ideas. If the synthesis writer does not have a clear sense of the source texts' meaning, structure, and context, she will have difficulty relating those texts to each other or to her own ideas and experience. The synthesis will fail, and no complex understanding will emerge, if the writer lacks the ability to think *about* and to think *with* source texts.

The Process of Synthesis

We might consider the process of synthesis as a journey, a thought excursion on which we lead our readers. Think of Dorothy and her journey through the Land of Oz. She begins with a question that is of interest to her (How can I get home?) and a hypothesis (The Wizard can get me home.). Her experiences in Kansas give her a certain perspective about how to address her problem. Along the way to the Emerald City, Dorothy encounters a variety of characters, each with a different perspective. She learns the story of the Scarecrow and alters the goal of her journey to include his point of view. Together, they meet the Tin Man and connect his knowledge, experience, and goals to their own. The Cowardly Lion's take adds a new dimension. The integration of these perspectives alters the hypothesis about the Wizard's capabilities as the journey moves forward. Just as every argument meets with opposition, Dorothy and company must deal with the counter-objectives of the Wicked Witch of the West as well as those of the Wizard. The travelers take unexpected detours. Each character has a talent or skill that responds to these challenges, just as each text in a synthesis can provide elements of a counterargument or different strategies for pursuing a question. Dorothy's journey culminates in a new thought configuration, one quite different from the original hypothesis (There's no place like home—I was home all along).

Synthesis writing is a complex process, and research and experience tell us that students struggle with this kind of writing. While synthesis may seem to be the result of a linear procedure (reading → summarizing → analyzing → synthesis), such an understanding of synthesizing would be misleading. Research has shown that writers who think of synthesis as the last step



in a linear process tend to produce papers that are strung-together summaries and analyses rather than true integrations and connections of ideas (Mateos and Solé 448; McGinley 235).

In order to put texts into conversation with each other, the synthesis writer plays several roles. First, she is a careful reader of texts, placing herself in the position of each text's ideas in order to fully comprehend them. Next, she is a careful summarizer and analyzer, selecting significant ideas from the texts, integrating and connecting them in accordance with an overarching idea that begins as a hypothesis and emerges as a thesis from interaction with the texts. This second role requires note-taking and draft writing, as well as revisiting the texts in order to develop and support a thesis. Then she must become the reader of her own draft, ensuring that she leads the reader clearly through the thought processes that connect the texts she is synthesizing. Successful synthesis writers engage in a recursive process, moving back and forth between reading and writing. Likewise, the structure of the synthesis reflects this recursive process, considering each text in light of both the controlling idea (thesis) and the texts that have already been discussed so far.

Strategies for Synthesis Writing

When you write a synthesis, much of your thought journeying will take place before you begin to write the paper that will be the final product—in reading, note-taking, pre-writing, drafting, and especially *thinking* about the texts you are synthesizing. Careful reading (or viewing, if it is a visual text) and annotation of each source text is a good way to begin. You may find it useful to write a brief summary of each text to consolidate the main and subordinate points of the argument or information firmly in your mind. In note-taking or free-writing, analyze elements of each text such as context, structure, strategy, and tone. As you progress through your note-taking and annotations, you will already be comparing sources in your mind, revisiting the first text in the light of subsequent texts.

A synthesis paper can begin with a question to be explored through multiple source texts. An instructor may ask you to generate your own *issue question* about the texts, or you may be asked to respond to a prompt question. Working with source texts through summary and analysis will lead to the refinement of a controlling idea: the thesis. The synthesis writer will bring the texts into dialogue with each other by asking questions: What do these texts have in common? In what ways do they disagree? Do they differ

in the presentation or interpretation of evidence? Do they disagree about underlying beliefs or important assumptions? How do I, as the writer, respond to these texts and the subject or issue under discussion? How do the texts bring my own knowledge and assumptions into question? What insights come out of this interaction among source texts and my own ideas? After considering such questions, you should be able to formulate a tentative thesis or at least an issue question (Ramage, Bean, and Johnson 4-45).

This writer, student Lisa Regganie, begins an exploratory argument by introducing an issue question that she will use as a controlling idea in the synthesis of three texts:

Growing up in a small farming town, I have witnessed many of the townspeople not continue on to college after high school. They instead go into trades and work blue collar jobs. I am the daughter of parents who did not go to college. My father just did not want to go; he wanted to be a blue collar worker. My mother, on the other hand wanted to go, but her parents could not afford it. My father does not regret not going to college, but my mother regrets it every day that she steps into her dead end job. Both of my parents did not even question sending me to college, and I knew that going to college would be the only way out of the tentative lifestyle I grew up in. Luckily my parents knew this from the day I was born, so they started a college fund early and told me I could go wherever I wanted to go, be whatever I want to be, and they would bask in the glow of success. My background leads me to the question: *Does education really open up a whole new world to students?* I explored this idea in three essays by Helen Keller, Richard Rodriguez, and Malcolm X.

The author develops her argument by exploring the three essays with the aim of answer her question. She arrives at her conclusion by considering how each text relates to her issue question:

Helen Keller, Richard Rodriguez, and Malcolm X experience the awakening of different kinds of opportunity through very different modes of education. *In all three cases, opportunity lies within the learner; the opportunity of education is not something I passively receive, but is mine to take, as these students did.* The new outlook on the world I will gain after college will be worth the hard classes, homework, and stress.



In the example above, the author began with a question and answered it in her conclusion. In the following introduction, writer Gabrielle Caputo answers a prompt question (What do Robert Reich and Colin Beavan say about the relationship between happiness and material success, and how to these authors affect your view of this relationship?) in a thesis that synthesizes the views of two authors and her own view:

People are distracted from what is truly important in life because they fixate on making decisions concerning insignificant things and believing that possessions will bring happiness. Robert B. Reich in his article “The Choice Fetish: Blessings and Curses of a Market Idol,” and Colin Bevan in his book *No Impact Man* insist upon this, and while they are right, each fails to address how the lack of popular examples of people who are successful without money makes us think having money and items is the sole way to achieve success.

Methods of Organization

There are two common methods for organizing a synthesis: around the source texts (*block method*) or around the points of connection (*alternating method*).

1. Block Method:

- **Introduction** with claim or issue question
- Text 1
 - Introduce this source with a brief summary of its ideas, providing its rhetorical context. (Some relevant points for context might include the following: Who is the author(s)? Why should the reader pay attention to what the author(s) has to say about this subject? What is the source’s place in the conversation about the claim or issue?) Apply the methods and conventions of good **summary** writing.
 - Analyze this source’s ideas in relation to the points of connection you have discovered among the source texts and the controlling idea that has emerged from these connections. Respond with your own ideas about the source’s position on these points. For example, if your main idea is that knowledge

of language opens the door to human relationship and you are discussing Helen Keller's "Everything Has a Name," you will consider how her account of acquiring language demonstrates a new connection to the people in her life.

- Text 2
 - Introduce this source as well, by giving a summary of its main ideas and putting it in context. The difference between this introduction and the first one is that you will transition from the first text to this one by pointing out some similarity of dissimilarity (or both) between the first source text and this one. This connection you establish between texts is crucial and should be discussed in clear, specific fashion. Don't expect your reader to see or make the connection herself. For example, let's say you are introducing Richard Rodriguez's "Private and Public Language" into a conversation about language and human relationship. You might open the summary by pointing out that while Keller's account tells of how language leads to a discovery of relationships in her immediate family circle, Rodriguez's knowledge of language opens the possibility of public relationships.
 - Analyze this source's ideas in relation to the controlling idea, but do so by putting this source in conversation with the previous text as well as your own ideas. How is Rodriguez's experience similar to Keller's, and how is it different?
- Text 3
 - Repeat this process with the third text and with any subsequent texts you discuss. Avoid isolating the texts into a string of separate summaries/analyses. Keep the texts in conversation with each other by discussing points of connection.
 - **Conclude** by telling the reader how the conversation among these texts has changed our understanding of the subject under discussion.

2. Alternating Method:

- **Introduction** with claim or issue question. Let's say that in your essay you want to discuss three components of happiness: choice, wealth, and community. You will be considering these ideas in the light of essays by Robert Reich ("The Choice Fetish,")



and Gregory Mantsios (“Class in America—2006”) and Colin Beavan’s book *No Impact Man*.

- **First point of connection** among the source texts. Describe one of the ideas that these texts have in common. The texts may agree or disagree or take differently nuanced positions on this point.
 - Introduce Text 1 by briefly placing it in its rhetorical context (see questions relevant to rhetorical context in “Text 1” above). Discuss this text’s position on this point of connection. For example, Robert Reich sees the overabundance of trivial choices as a nuisance that distracts us from issues that are more important to our ultimate happiness.
 - Add Text 2 to the conversation, also briefly placing it in context. Colin Beavan would agree with Reich, in that he believes that most of the choices we make concerning material objects are unnecessary and even destructive.
 - Add Text 3 and any subsequent texts in the same way. Include your own ideas in the conversation. Gregory Mantsios would point out that many Americans are too poor to have *enough* choice and would appreciate having some of the choices that Reich and Beavan are complaining about.
- **Second point of connection.** Repeat the process described above, putting the texts in conversation about this point. In the discussion of this and subsequent points, you obviously will not need to introduce the texts and put them in context.
- Continue discussion with connecting point 3.
- **Conclude** by telling the reader how the conversation among these texts has changed our understanding of the subject under discussion.

You can combine these methods by beginning with the block method and then putting sources in conversation with each other using the alternating method. Notice that decisions about the order in which you discuss texts or connecting points will be very important to your argument. You may decide, during the drafting process, to change the order of these elements to enhance the effectiveness of your argument.

Dorothy and friends follow the yellow brick road and signs along the way of the journey. In synthesis writing, you must use *transitional language* to

guide readers on the thought journey, helping readers identify the various “speakers” in the conversation and their positions. Use words and phrases to introduce a new perspective and to signal a shift in thought. To introduce the ideas of one text, use active verbs. Don’t merely tell us that an author or work “says” something. Try:

Jones *demonstrates, argues, asserts, or reminds...*

This film *portrays, represents, or tells the story of...*

Use transitions to signal the relations of source ideas to each other:

While Jones believes _____, Smith takes the opposite view.

Jones and Smith hold similar positions in all but _____.
(Graff, Birkenstein, and Durst 71–75)

Note in the following paragraphs how student writer Judith Howard uses transitional language to put the ideas of her sources in a conversation about the individual and community responsibility:

Both Beavan and the Dalai Lama see individual action as having a powerful impact on more than just the individual. At various places in *No Impact Man*, **Beavan expresses** the idea that individual actions are what constitute collective action. He values the influence of small, individual actions as being critical to the formation of larger movements. **The Dalai Lama speaks** about the impact of one person’s actions on another person. He calls for compassion in action, arguing that if our actions lack compassion, they can become dangerous. He makes the point that if we are not considerate of how our individual actions affect the welfare of other people, “inevitably we end up hurting them” (261). **Beavan makes a similar point** concerning the environment: that if we are careless about our impact on the environment, we will cause great harm to it and all other people as a result.

When discussing the individual, **Reich maintains** a position that supports the value of individual choice for the individual’s sake **while the Dalai Lama, in contrast**, considers individuals almost entirely as part of a collective. **Reich, despite supporting community**, puts more emphasis on personal desires. After dismissing the smaller, less significant choices that people are able to make, he calls for us to make the more relevant choices, “Such as what we

stand for, to what and whom we're going to commit our lives, and what we want by way of a community and a society" (Reich 66). The focus in this sentence is on the important aspects of life from an individual's perspective. **When the Dalai Lama focuses** on the desires of people, he uses the same phrase various times to describe the most basic desire of humanity: "to be happy and not to suffer" (258). He uses this shared wish to connect all of mankind and to therefore emphasize the responsibility that we have toward each and every other human being.

Remember that the conventions of acknowledging sources apply in this kind of writing. Cite sources in text whenever you summarize, paraphrase, or quote another author's ideas. Provide a Works Cited page that fully and accurately cites all your sources.

For additional resources on writing summaries, please see Purdue's *OWL*. Using the search bar, search for "Synthesis Essays."



Sample Student Synthesis Essays

Ford 1

Emmylou Ford
Professor Weller
UCWR 110
Synthesis Essay
3 March 2015

From Emmylou to Ami Gaye: A Perspective on Multicultural Identity

“Ey, Ami Gaye!” It was a name I often heard while walking down the sandy pathways of my village in rural Senegal, but it took months before I felt like it was my identity. Upon arriving in my new home, I was given a new name and a new way of life. For months, I resisted when told to eat with my hands, attend Muslim prayer, and correct the pronunciation of my distorted Wolof words. I struggled to balance a new culture with my old identity while still wanting to be accepted by this new community despite my blatant differences. Bhatia Mukherjee’s essay “Two Ways to Belong to America” and Amy Tan’s essay “Mother Tongue” touch on these struggles of multiculturalism. In Mukherjee’s essay, she explores the differences between herself and her sister as they navigate immigration and identity. Tan, in her essay, describes the effect her mother has had on her perception of her environment. By means of these relationships, Tan and Mukherjee explore how language and assimilation have impacted their multicultural identity.

Tan’s ability to oscillate between Chinese and American culture allows her to observe how language can be a barrier when trying to be accepted in a new culture. Tan’s use of anecdotes is

Ford 2

powerful in demonstrating the sharp contrast between the treatment that she and her mother receive due to language. Tan builds the reader's vicarious frustration as she progresses from her previously ashamed view of her mother, to the anecdote of the baffled stockbroker, and then to the incident with the last CAT scan. In the latter anecdote, Tan portrays the staff at the hospital as uncompassionate when Tan's mother states her anxiety over the scan in light of her husband and son's death due to brain tumors; however, the staff "did not seem to have any sympathy" that compelled them to find her results (420). This treatment ceases when a staff member communicates directly to Tan, who speaks "perfect English" (420). This demonstrates the mentality of disregard toward those who speak English with an accent or with incorrect grammar.

Mukherjee's narrative also showcases the barriers immigrants face; however, she addresses the struggles they face when confronted with the choice of assimilation. Mukherjee portrays her sister, Mira's, anger over the law reform that discriminates against resident non-citizens. After years of dedicating her "professional skills into the improvement of [America]," she states that she "feel[s] used...manipulated and discarded" (292). However, by comparing Mira's situation to a similar one Mukherjee faced in Canada, Mukherjee implies that Mira is responsible for her struggles since she did not decide to simply obtain American citizenship. Mukherjee chose to be in a place that allowed her to be "a part of the community [she] adopted," arguing that the only way to be accepted and appreciated by society is to assimilate, culturally and legally, to the new country (293). Mira's aversion

Ford 3

to assimilation is a choice that distances her from her new country, whereas Tan's mother's struggles in her new country are arbitrated by others.

Despite the barriers immigrants face, Tan's capability to navigate language has allowed her to build connections, especially with her mother. Tan's ability to understand her mother's "broken" or "limited" English is imperative in establishing the dynamic of their relationship (419). The transcription of her mother's dialogue is a powerful tool to showcase the apparent challenges in understanding her speech. Tan's later description of her attachment to her mother and this style of speech, despite its difficulty, produces a sense of respect from the reader. This is further developed when Tan describes the protective ways in which she caters to her mother, mainly through speaking on her mother's behalf. Tan needs to defend her mother since her speech has "helped shape the way [she] saw things, expressed things, [and] made sense of the world" (419).

Like Tan, Mukherjee can also compare herself to familial relationships and come to a better understanding of her multicultural identity. Using Mira as a calibration for assimilation, Mukherjee is able to look at her own sense of belonging with satisfaction. Looking at their immigrant journey, Mukherjee comments that "there could not be a wider divergence" (292). While Mira clings to her "saris [and] delightfully accented English," Mukherjee "surrender[ed] those" for the "trauma of self-transformation" (292, 293). Mukherjee's diction elicits negative and painful connotations, but she also states that she "married" America and "embraced" her immigrant status (292). Willing

Ford 4

to undergo the arduous pursuit of citizenship and cultural assimilation, Mukherjee, unlike her sister, also gained acceptance. Unfortunately, unlike Tan's multicultural relationship with her mother, Mukherjee distanced herself from her sister through this assimilation.

Due to my experience abroad, I can empathize with both Mukherjee's and Tan's perspective on multicultural identity. Seeing how language is our primary means of communication and understanding, it's fitting that Tan argues that it drives our perception of the world. I can attest that when I speak Wolof because I very much embody Ami Gaye, a girl who tends to relationships differently than Emmylou Ford. This is partly due to how culture drives the language but is also in response to how others treat me when I speak "broken" Wolof. As much as I tried to straddle the multicultural line, I was never fully accepted, which is imperative to assimilation, as we saw with Tan's mother and both the Mukherjee sisters. Bharati Mukherjee was able to overcome some of her flagrant differences, unlike Tan's mother, and assimilate. The Mukherjee sisters and I understand that assimilation comes at a great cost: giving up parts of oneself. As trivial as it may seem, I was never willing to neglect the comfort of pants and don a wrap-around *pagne*, a traditional garment made from a rectangular strip of fabric fashioned into a loincloth or wrapped on the body to form a short skirt. For this reason I could never be looked at as an accepted equal. While language and physicality hinder acceptance, as in my own case as well as Tan's mother and the Mukherjee sisters, so does the choice to surrender one's own traditions and identity, a decision Mira and I struggled with.

Ford 5

Mukherjee and Tan's relationships help them better understand their personal identity, but also their identity within the cultures they navigate. Tan's unique communication with her mother is a form of intimacy that defines her perception of self, which contributes to her interpretation of the world. Tan is able to transcend both American and Chinese culture, while Mukherjee stakes her identity firmly in American culture. By comparing herself to her sister, these choices are affirmed. The struggles of immigrants, second-generation children, and even travelers spawn from how we interact with the world. My name, whether it's Ami Gaye, Emily, or Emmylou, is how I identify myself but also how the world recognizes me. This is why relationships are so central to identity, as with Tan and Mukherjee; it is an understanding of self that is affirmed by those around us.

Works Cited

- Mukherjee, Bharati. "Two Ways to Belong in America." *50 Essays: A Portable Anthology*, 4th ed., edited by Samuel Cohen, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014, pp. 290–293.
- Tan, Amy. "Mother Tongue." *50 Essays: A Portable Anthology*, 4th ed., edited by Samuel Cohen, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014, pp. 417–423.

OR

Works Cited

- Cohen, Samuel, editor. *50 Essays: A Portable Anthology*, 4th ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014.
- Mukherjee, Bharati, "Two Ways to Belong in America." Cohen, pp. 290–293.
- Tan, Amy. "Mother Tongue," Cohen, pp. 417–423.

Olivia Oeff
Professor Johnstone
UCWR 110-601
27 October 2015

The No-Name Life of Willa Shakespeare

It is said that everyone has skeletons in their closets, but what about ghosts on their shoulders? As children, we all believed in ghosts, and perhaps we were not wrong to do so; we carry around the ghosts of our past in our bones, and by knowing them we can have a fuller idea of our own identity. My search to illuminate the ghosts on my shoulder, as well as my journey in discovering how these ghosts impact my personal identity as a woman artist, led me to the essays “No Name Woman” by Maxine Hong Kingston and “What If Shakespeare Had Had A Sister?” by Virginia Woolf. These essays, written by and about women who experienced some sort of creative oppression, guided me in my examination of my role as a legacy of the female “ghosts” who were not allowed to live or create as I do. In order to find my own place in this line of succession, I asked of the essays and of myself: what were the means of women’s oppression, and how did this oppression contribute to their roles as the ghosts that haunted Woolf, Kingston, and, through them, me?

“No Name Woman” discusses Chinese culture in the 1930s and one socially ostracized, nameless woman, who eventually takes her own life rather than live in a world where she is universally hated. A modern reader like myself immediately wonders how her own self-worth became lower in her estimation than honoring her family and community. The short answer seems to

Oeff 2

be that she was indoctrinated into a culture that conditioned her to have this belief. One way this was manifested was denying women education and other opportunities that their male relatives were able to enjoy. Kingston discusses the inherent disadvantage that Chinese women inherited by contrasting her father and uncle's educations and travels to America while "they expected her alone to keep the traditional ways, which her brothers... could fumble without detection" (231) That she took her own life is also a sign of her deep indoctrination; her culture's disapproval of her and her upbringing, which taught her the utmost important of honoring one's family, led her to her death without the community members ever laying a hand on her. In this way, it is apparent that the no-name woman was conditioned socially to place less value on her life than on the lives of those around her.

These same means of oppressing women can be seen in Woolf's "What If Shakespeare Had Had a Sister?" because it also discusses the ways women were conditioned to be devoid of creativity. As in "No Name Woman," women were intellectually and emotionally manipulated at a young age so that their ambitions of being anything but faithful wives and mothers would dry up. Like the nameless aunt who was forced to stick to housewifery while her brother went to America, one way this was put into practice was the lack of meaningful education, the education that was offered to boys like William Shakespeare. The sixteenth-century woman, as Woolf points out, was given neither the education nor the creative freedom that begets genius. Despite being "as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was" (470), Shakespeare's hypothetical sister "was not sent

Oeff 3

to school. She had no chance of learning grammar or logic, let alone of reading Horace or Virgil” (470). Just as Kingston depicts the gruesome scene of the nameless aunt’s suicide, Woolf predicts that the creative woman “would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village” (472). In these ways, “No Name Woman” and “What If Shakespeare Had Had a Sister?” present the social conditioning that women underwent that led them to abhor their own rebellious minds and the shame they would bring on themselves by being unladylike enough to have a child or write a book.

Both of these essays focus on society’s outrage at women’s potency, the creative ability of female minds and wombs. Babies and ideas are, after all, both *conceptual* in the strictest of senses, and society resented Kingston’s aunt and Shakespeare’s hypothetical sister for their conceiving minds and bodies. In Kingston’s essay, society rejected her aunt’s physical conception of a child, though if women conceive, who can be blamed in the first place but a man? In Kingston’s essay, the man who was her rapist was “not, after all, much different from her husband. They both gave orders: she followed” (231). This homogenizing of men reveals their status as a class above women, a class that seemed to be made up more of drill officers than of fellow human beings. While women were socially and politically on a class beneath men, the cultural mystique raised the expected ideal of femininity to almost an astral plane. Women were expected to fulfill the social ideal of a chaste, graceful, attractive, godlike woman so pure that she seemed to operate on some angelic realm entirely parallel to reality. The no-name aunt was punished for breaking this image of the cultural

Oeff 4

ideal of womanly perfection by disillusioning the village with the blatant humanity of her not-so-immaculate conception.

Woolf's essay deals with a parallel issue in that the hypothetical female Shakespeares were scorned for their mental conceptions as a result of being simultaneously idolized and oppressed. Again, men play an important role in this subjection of women. Woolf expresses this idea by discussing the ways men used women as vehicles in their own art without allowing women the freedom to make art themselves. Masculine artists placed women on the same pedestal that the ideally chaste Chinese woman occupies in "No Name Woman"; Woolf's summation of the situation is that a woman in real life compared to artistic renderings of woman was "a worm winged like an eagle; the spirit of life and beauty in a kitchen chopping up suet" (468). This emphasizes the contrast between the heavenly ideal of women and their lack of artistic allowance in real life. These images signify men's appropriating women's power by rendering them pretty...and powerless. Kingston recognizes that without men, women would never conceive babies; Woolf reminds us that without women as subjects, men could never conceive the art that they do. These women's creations end up sharing the same fate as their conceivers. The no-name aunt dies clutching her newborn baby, as nameless as the titleless books that the Shakespearean sister died without articulating when "she died young. She never wrote a word" (475). The difference between the two essays lies in society's response to the conceptions of mind and body. Ironically, Kingston's no-name aunt, who is persecuted for her physical conception, is mentally beaten down and driven to suicide by her community;

Oeff 5

Shakespeare's hypothetical sister would have experienced the reverse situation, being physically "severely beaten" (470) as punishment for the mental conception her book represented.

Shakespeare's sister is indeed hypothetical; Shakespeare himself had no sisters. In this way Woolf's essay and Kingston's are also more interrelated than originally meets the eye. Both essays are mixes of facts, fiction, history, biography, and supposition. Woolf and Kingston devote their attentions not to the proud family histories or the books actually written, but to the lack of female writers, the aunt-shaped holes in history. This is especially shown in Kingston's essay when she emphasizes the no-name aunt as silent, nameless, purposefully forgotten by her family and by history. This silence was a form of punishment; Kingston states that "the real punishment was not the raid swiftly inflicted by the villagers, but the family's deliberately forgetting her" (238). This form of oppressive silence lasts for decades until Kingston's mother tells her daughter the story to scare her and shame her into submission to the culture. Kingston's mother's instruction for her to not "tell this story to anyone" sets the theme of silencing women and their stories for the remainder of the essay. Kingston, in the very writing of the essay, breaks the stigma around her aunt and the decades-long silence. Ghosts are nothing if not silent, and perhaps that is Kingston's purpose in writing, to speak for the ghost without words.

Woolf seems to share this goal by writing for the thousands of women who weren't able to write for themselves. Woolf indicated that she is haunted in the same way as Kingston by stating that "this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the

Oeff 6

cross-roads still lives. She lives in you and me” (475). The ghosts of the Chinese woman whose lives were scapegoats for their culture and the ghosts of a million female Shakespeares who were never encouraged to write are also similar in their namelessness. Just as Kingston’s aunt’s name has been erased by history, so are names of the millions of writers who never got to write. In Woolf’s essay too, silence plays an important role. Maxine Hong Kingston’s mother’s instruction to not “tell this story to anyone” is directly tied to Victorian women’s inability to speak for themselves through art. The distinction between the two essays lies, perhaps, in the ghosts’ dispositions. While Kingston suggests that her aunt’s ghost might be mad at her for “telling on her”, all indications suggest that Woolf believes that Shakespeare’s hypothetical sister would want to live on through future women artists.

It is strange for me to realize that, in perspective of the time these essays were written, I am one of these women artists of the future that Woolf puts her faith in. As a woman today, and in particular a woman artist today, I can’t imagine the weight of repression that the women depicted in these essays had to bear. In fact, I can’t picture myself growing up in such a world and being able to have become the person I am at all. My life is also very affected by my family’s history and ghosts, as I presume all families are. I grew up with anecdotes about relatives who died before I ever met them, and I wonder if one day I will be summed up in a quick story to someone’s children. I wonder which corner of my life they will choose, which tiny anecdote will become the whole story to some future generation. Not all ghosts are as pleasant as family heirlooms, of course, and some haven’t even gotten around

Oeff 7

to dying yet. My last name is a ghost of my great-grandfather, a man who left his family, but not before switching the “o” and the “e” of my German last name to help people pronounce it more easily (it didn’t help). Though no one was sad to see him go and no one talks much of him, I still carry around the ghost of the violent man every time I introduce myself or sign my name.

The junction of these two articles allows me to not only appreciate my artistic freedom, my ability to conceive ideas and create, but also gives me a greater peace with the idea of ghosts like my great grandfather. Our pasts enrich us, and the death and destruction that ghosts are associated with also hold the deepest possibility of conception and birth. The past can never be relived, but it can be retold, and perhaps even reborn. When I was reading Maya Angelou’s book *A Letter to My Daughter* several years ago, a quote struck a chord with me that I have remembered since: “I believe that one carries the shadows, the dreams, the fears and dragons of home under one’s skin, at the extreme corners of one’s eyes and possibly in the gristle of the earlobe.” This quote is applicable to Woolf’s essay and Kingston’s because both speak of the past in terms of the present; both bring legacies from the past forward to haunt us and to fulfill their lost destinies. Home is less of a place than we believe it to be, and while I think “home is where the heart is” is too broadly encompassing to fit the bill, I do believe that our legacies, the family and national histories that form our identities, and our homes are one and the same. The “fears and dragons of home” that Woolf and Kingston reveal do not lurk in their earlobes, but in their hands, as they write words and pass them on to us, the readers. Their words—sometimes gentle,

Oeff 8

sometimes violent—pass from their hands to ours, and from their shoulders, ghosts silent as death find speech once again.

Works Cited

Kingston, Maxine Hong. "No Name Woman." *50 Essays: A Portable Anthology*, 4th ed., edited by Samuel Cohen, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014, pp. 227–39.

Woolf, Virginia. "What if Shakespeare Had Had a Sister?" *50 Essays: A Portable Anthology*, 4th ed., edited by Samuel Cohen, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014, pp. 466–76.

OR

Works Cited

Cohen, Samuel, editor. *50 Essays: A Portable Anthology*, 4th ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. "No Name Woman," Cohen, pp. 227–39.

Woolf, Virginia. "What if Shakespeare Had Had a Sister?" Cohen, pp. 446–76.

