

Dictee Study Guide

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Opening

Opening Summary

In the opening paragraph, she comes from far, and at dinner, her family asks about her first day. She answers "there is but one there... there is someone." In "Disease," she mimics the gestures of speaking with her mouth, but the breath falls away. She gathers her strength and remains in this position as the pain of speech fosters inside of her. She swallows in preparation. It augments, and she swallows against the pain that wishes it to speak. She allows others to occupy her barren cavities. There might be an echo when the amplification stops, and then she might make an attempt at the pause in the echo. She "waits inside the pause. Inside her." The pause ends, and the voice wraps another, thicker layer from the waiting and the pain to say or to not say. She waits to absorb and deliver their punctuation. She relays the recitation. The weight evenly presses down the back of her head to the front, causing her to gasp from its pressure and contracting motion. It does not contain any more voices. It rises, floods and dissolves her. The above traces from her head to her mouth, turning her inside out. It begins imperceptibly, and she takes the pause slowly. The time and the pause are now bare, and they belong to her.

The narrator appeals to the Muse to tell the story, beginning where she wishes. Next, there are twelve sentences to be written in French. Some of these follow: "the harder the task, the more honorable the labor" and "the more a man praises himself, the less inclined are others to praise him." Next comes nine sentences to translate into French; all are on the topics of speaking and writing. The French lesson ends with ten sentences to conjugate the verbs in French. The narrator again makes an invocation without addressing anyone. During communion, a woman kneels, sticks out her tongue and receives Him as she prays. By then, the priest, the one who invokes in the Name, is at the other end of the line. Reverting to the style of a French lesson, nine paragraphs follow this scene with the mandate to translate them into French.

The narrator makes up sins during Confession in order to guarantee absolution. Since God sees everything, the words are an act of contrition rather than an actual confession. In a question and answer format, the narrator reveals that God made thee, God is everywhere, and God has made everyone in his own likeness. On the first Friday, one hour before mass, a single file line walks down the hall with a sound instrument which contains the image of the Virgin Mary shrouded in clouds. The procession begins, and the novena of the Immaculate Conception is announced. There will be nine each, prayer and devotions during a nine day period. It begins. Nationality, kind, blood, ancestry, generation, breed and greed are misplaced. This section ends with a prayer, "In Nomine le Nom Nomine."



Opening Analysis

The first page of the opening is a paragraph in French followed by its translation in English. The paragraph is very vague and is frequently interrupted by grammatical words, such as paragraph, thrown sporadically between the description of the narrative. The next narrative is titled "Disease" which means a woman who is a skilled and usually professional performer of monologues. This is the first appearance of this term which is repeated throughout the book. "Disease" is a vague narrative that refers to an unnamed she. There are many references to speaking and the resemblance of speech; this introduces the theme of the struggle for women to speak. This narrative also describes the physical activity necessary to speak, stating that it is necessary to gather strength in order to speak. The concept of the pain of speaking versus the pain of not speaking is italicized to emphasize its importance. The fact that she "allows others to occupy her" suggests that she submits to oppression. She gains control at the end of the narrative.

The narrator appeals to the Muses to tell the story, invoking the Western female literary tradition. The next several pages are organized as though they are a French lesson. Near the end of this section is a description of the physical act of prayer which includes many Catholic allusions. The narrator distinguishes between God/Jesus and the priest by He or he. Next come nine paragraphs to be translated into French. Several of them also contains Catholic allusions. Others refer to France. Confession is a symbol of action by expressing the words since God sees everything and it is unnecessary to tell him one's sins. The act of Dictée before mass is described before the novena of the Immaculate Conception begins. The novena is nine each over a nine day period, introducing the importance of the number nine which foreshadows the book containing nine sections. It begins. A short poem alludes to nationality, race, generation and gender, foreshadowing some of the topics throughout the rest of the book. The final page of the opening is a Catholic prayer "In nomine le nom nomine."



Clio: History

Clio: History Summary

Yu Guan Soon is born on March 15, 1903 and dies October 20, 1920. She is born of one mother and one father. She makes her duration (her lifetime) complete as others before her have made theirs complete, without the leisure to examine the truths and untruths according to history. "Truth embraces with it all other abstentions other than itself." She calls their names, Joan of Arc three times and Ahn Joon Kun five times. There are no people without a nation and ancestry. No other nations have their independence. Their country, with five thousand years of history, has lost it to the Japanese. Japan creates an assembly to discuss everything that happens in the realm of Korea. Fifty Japanese advisers, "men of little experience and less responsibility," work in Seoul, producing many ordinances and new regulations as the government is changed from an absolute monarchy to a government where the king is governed by his ministers.

Guan Soon is the only daughter of four children born to patriotic parents. Her actions are exceptional from her youth. Her identity, acts of generosity and self-sacrifice could be exchanged with any heroine in history. In 1919, Guan Soon is sixteen years old as the Japanese conspire to overthrow the Korean government by killing Queen Min and her royal family. Afterward, Guan Soon forms a resistance, actively beginning revolutionary work. The nationally organized movement does not accept her seriousness as a young woman and try to dissuade her efforts, but she demonstrates her dedication and is appointed messenger. She organizes the largest collective outcry against the Japanese occupation of the Korean people on March 1, 1919. Guan Soon makes her life complete as others have made their lives complete. She sees four places where engagements are fought. At one, the Japanese retire with five killed, but the other three are Japanese victories. She wonders if their object is to stir every honest man into a frenzy and, if not, why they practice such wicked policy. Authorities should police the districts properly or admit their incapacity for controlling Korea.

In "Suppression of Foreign Criticism," a bad fight takes place eight miles from Su-won on September 12, 1907. Thirty volunteers offer no resistance but are shot down by Japanese officers. Two more volunteers are decapitated. It is evidence of the exultation of one enemy people institutionalizing suffering on another people. The enemy nation grows larger than its own identity to the nation being oppressed; Japan is such a nation. Nations who are not subjected to this oppression cannot understand. They only see in history how one nation disregards the humanity of another. To other nations, these accounts have no discernible features. The narrator answers the question of why is it important to resurrect history: so as not to repeat the same mistakes. On July 12, 1905, the eight thousand Koreans in Hawaii hold a mass meeting and present an appeal to President Roosevelt explaining that Japan made a treaty of alliance with Korea but has since treated the Korean people very badly with disregard to their treaty. Since America has many interests in Korea and advocates for fair play, the Koreans appeal to the



United States for help to preserve the autonomy of the Korean government and prevent other powers from oppressing the Korean people. On March 1, 1919, everyone who carries the national flag knows the punishment. Her parents lead the march for independence; they fall as do her brothers and many others. Guan Soon is arrested as a leader of the rebellion. She is stabbed in the chest and imprisoned. She reveals no names during her questioning. Guan Soon receives a prison sentence of seven years. There is an eternity in one act of martyrdom for the history of one nation and one people. Some do not age because time stops as their image is "not given to deterioration." It misses the memory, but time does not move, remaining stagnant instead. The decapitated forms reveal the absent, but the remnant is whole and the memory is entire.

Clio: History Analysis

The second section of the book is named Clio, after the muse of History. Clio opens with a photo of a young woman, presumably Yu Guan Soon, but there is no caption. Her name, birth date and date of death are given on the opposite page, showing that she was seventeen years old when she died. The fact that she was born of one mother and one father shows that she was human, in opposition to Jesus Christ who was born of one mother and the heavenly father. The next two pages contain Asian characters. Yu Guan Soon is compared to others who have also made their duration complete. The truth is personified by being described as being "oblivious to itself." Next comes allusions to Joan of Arc and Ahn Joong Kun. The narrator provides an account of Japan's oppression of Korea, providing background for the short biography that follows about Yu Guan Soon.

Yu Guan Soon is marked exceptional from an early age; this foreshadows her revolutionary work, as does her association with Korea. Yu Guan Soon is compared to her mother, father and brothers who are also patriots. "Suppression of Foreign Criticism" describes the fight that occurs eight miles from Su-won on September 12, 1907, detailing Japan's unnecessary cruelty. The other nations do not understand the horrors of wars that they are not participant in. The importance of recalling history is detailed as a way to prevent the same mistakes from being repeated. The Koreans of Hawaii write a letter to President Roosevelt on July 12, 1905, foreshadowing America's involvement in the dispute between Korea and Japan which initiates the first World War. A march is described, during which Guan Soon's parents and brothers are killed. Guan Soon is imprisoned as a leader of the rebellion but her refusal to reveal names during her torture demonstrates her bravery. She is titled as martyr. She is able to defy time and death by her actions which live on forever. The horrors of war are recalled, but Guan Soon escapes death by her bravery. A picture of three martyrs being tortured by soldiers follows this narrative. Next, a handwritten copy of a portion of the final narrative suggests that Cha is not the original author.



Calliope: Epic Poetry

Calliope: Epic Poetry Summary

Mother is eighteen years old and was born in Yong Jung, Manchuria. Although she now lives in China, she is Korean. Her parents moved to China to escape the Japanese occupation in Korea. She lives in a village with other Korean refugees on land that is not her own. She no longer wants to see what they do to her people. She suffers having left Korea though her spirit has not left; her spirit is not in the past but burns. She is a child still at eighteen years old. She has been ill and sheltered for her entire life. Mother speaks the mandatory language because her native tongue is forbidden, but she secretly speaks her mother tongue in the dark; it is her refuge and a way to return home. Speaking saddens her since each word means risking death. She sings the national song that is forbidden. They take her tongue and the choral hymn from her, but she says that it will not be for long. Her spirit alights. The answer will come soon after the offering. They have not yet forbidden her to see, and she sees further than is allowed. She silently bides her time for thirty-six years. In the days before the reclamation, her mother and father die while uttering their only regret: not seeing the overthrow with their own eyes. Mother writes and speaks to scatter the words.

It is 1940 and she is eighteen years old. She has just graduated college and is going to her first teaching post in a small country village for three years to repay her school loans to Manchuria. She is hardly an adult and has never left her parents' house being the youngest of four children and sheltered. She travels to the village via train, and the villagers, especially the children, stare at her. She is the first female teacher in this village in six years. A male teacher greets her in Japanese. Since Japan occupies Korea and is attempting China, their presence is felt even in small villages where Japanese is spoken and the Japanese flag hangs. The teachers speak Japanese to each other although they are all Korean. Mother is assigned to the first grade which contains fifty students who must learn to speak their names in Korean and Japanese. She speaks Korean to them because they are too young to understand Japanese. She is alone, and her hardships are immense as she is unaccustomed to the daily life in this village. She sends all of her money home except what is necessary for room and board; she is barely able to eat. Mother takes a train home where she calls her mother from the gate. Her mother rushes to her, bringing her food. Mother is home because her mother means home to her. Mother is the first sound and the first concept.

On Sunday afternoon, Mother must return to school where the students wait to see her home and bring her food. She works Monday through Thursday, but she does not feel well on Friday as she feels herself yielding to them. She moves ahead of the movement; she is movement. She comes to an enormous house where women stand in beautiful clothing. She passes the large flower bed and the large hall where women dance. Entranced, she moves toward the restaurant where three women approach her from the opposite direction, carrying large dishes of food which captivate and immobilize her. They smile, offering her food, but she refuses persistently. The third woman pushes her



down and says "If you do not eat, you must become a cripple." She falls; her parents hold her hands, and she asks them to unfold her fingers which begin to curl. Her parents cry, saying that the fingers curl when one is about to die. Her father asks how she lives when she does not eat. When she asks for food, they say that the last request of those dying is to eat as they give her food. There is no more exile and no black crows to mourn Mother. Neither Heaven nor Hell takes her; she comes back to her mother and father. The narrator writes her mother daily from here. If she is not writing, she composes a letter in her thoughts. "You are here I raise the voice." Sound particles scatter, becoming invisible. The narrator has the documents. One day, she raises her right hand, becomes American and is given an American passport. When she returns to her native country, she is no longer one of them. They question her about her identity and the reason for her return. She sees the unchanged and the unchangeable but is unable to speak. After they check each article and question her on foreign articles, they dismiss her.

Calliope: Epic Poetry Analysis

The third section of "Dictee" is titled Calliope who is the Greek muse of heroic poetry. It begins with an uncaptioned photograph of a young woman, likely Cha's mother, Hyung Soon Huo. Cha addresses her mother in the writing of this chapter. Hyung Soon Huo lives in China though she is Korean; this shows her exile from the war in her own country. She lives in a village of Korean refugees on land that is not her own, demonstrating the isolation and depression that accompanies exile instigated by war. Although she suffers from exile, her spirit does not leave. This demonstrates her patriotism and foreshadows her refusal to yield to the Japanese oppression. Hyung Soon Huo's family life is described; she is the youngest of four children which creates a parallel between her and Yu Guan Soon who is the only daughter of four children. This means that both women were protected more than their siblings.

Soon Huo demonstrates bravery by speaking Korean despite the fact that it is forbidden. The fact that she sees things that they do not want her to see suggests that she forms opinions that do not support the Japanese. After graduating from teacher's college, she is separated from her family to fulfill the obligations required to repay her school loans to the government. The villagers' stares demonstrate that Soon Huo is an outsider. The Japanese oppression is highlighted by the fact that the Korean teachers must speak Japanese. She demonstrates her duty to her family by sending the majority of her money home. Soon Huo is eager to return to her mother who she equates with home. She becomes ill as she feels herself yielding to the oppression. She suffers a form of dementia as she envisions the three women attempting to force her to partake of what they offer; this alludes to the temptation of Christ as biblical verses are quoted in this portion of the narrative. Soon Huo succeeds, emphasizing her patriotism. She seems to be dying but lives by her strength in adhering to her nationalism. This narrative is seceded by Asian characters. Next, the narrator writes to her mother about how she constantly writes and composes letters to her mother. She becomes American with the documents given to her, but this means that she is no longer accepted in her own country. Upon her return to Korea, she is inured with the inability to speak. Calliope

ends with a photo of an older woman, presumably Hyung Soon Huo at a later time than in the first picture.



Urania: Astronomy

Urania: Astronomy Summary

The nurse takes the narrator's left arm, tells her to make a fist and then open her hand to make the vein appear. She ties an elastic band tightly around her arm and presses a thumb against her flesh. She moves the elastic to the right arm and repeats the procedure, finding a vein. The nurse rubs alcohol on the narrator's arm with a cotton swab. The coolness disappears as the liquid evaporates. She takes the needle to the skin and extracts a sample. It appears in a flow all of a sudden, collecting and spilling over. The contents are housed in the membranes. It is enough now; the empty body waiting to contain is filled, and the nurse pulls the needle out. The blood flows suddenly in one line down the arm onto the table. It takes only seconds for the nurse to break the needle off its body and collect the blood directly from the wound. The "stain begins to absorb the material spilled on." She pushes cotton against the mark hard, and blood empties upon the surface. It is ever possible to expel the blood from a body.

The narrator heard the swans in the rain and listened to the spoken, but it is impossible to say if it is true. The memory of what was said is remembered, but she is not quite certain what she heard. The rain dreamed from sounds and the pauses, and it is impossible to distinguish speech. The tongue, mouth, throat and lungs are assembled as one organ. Returning later, the narrator is unsure if it was the rain, speech or memory as it diminishes itself. She bites the tongue until no organ is left; she cries. A little at a time, the silence draws nearer filling the pages and lines with void words and silences. She hears the mute signs, but they are never the same. As she listens to the signs in the rain, it is impossible to say whether it is true or not, impossible to distinguish the audible from signs, speech and memory which is uncertain. "Rain dreams the sounds", pauses, exhales and affirms, little by little. Silent phrases, paragraphs, pages and lines move nearer to the void. "Void the words. Void the silence." The sounds move, stopping and starting again, one at a time. They are contractions, noise, broken speech. They are the cracked and broken tongue, the semblance of speech. They swallow, inhale, stutter, start and stop. It is improper to rest before even beginning. It stops and starts before the proper pauses were expected but no more.

Urania: Astronomy Analysis

The third section of the book is dedicated to Urania, the Greek Muse of Astronomy. This section begins with a photo of the Asian zodiac. The first narrative is written in first person and describes the act of a nurse drawing blood from the narrator. The contents, the blood, fills the empty chamber, the needle. The majority of this section consists of a poem written in French with its English translation on the opposite page. The poem demonstrates the confusion of what is real compared to what is imaged after the passage of time. It details the importance of memory, sound and speech. It also highlights the unity of the speech organs and the pain that occurs when they are

immobilized. Within this poem, there are allusions to the written word which is frequently compared to the spoken word. Two diagrams of how the speech organs are connected follow the poem. This section ends with the stop and start of sound which emphasize the difficulty of speech and the pauses.



Melpomene: Tragedy

Melpomene: Tragedy Summary

She sits in the first few rows to better ignore the others and to have a better view, more face to face with the screen. The lights fade until it is dark. She stretches out as far as possible until her neck rests on the back of the seat, and she pulls her coat up to her chin, covering her entire body. She watches the moving shades and the flickering light through the windows. The submission is complete and relinquishes the vision to immobility. It abandons all protests as it is about to appear. "The illusion that the act of viewing is to make alteration of the visible" shows that expulsion is immediate; not one second is lost to the replication of the totality. The seen is severed by the incision.

The narrator writes her mother on April, 19th, eighteen years later from Seoul, Korea. They have been away all this time, but nothing has changed. It is not June 25, 1950, and no bombs fall. "Every bird that migrates North for Spring and South for Winter becomes a metaphor for the longing of return. Destination. Homeland." There is no destination except another refuge from another war. She knew that thirty-six years in exile would not be in vain and that some day her country would be her own. The day finally comes as Japan is defeated in the World War, and she returns to her country. As soon as she hears, she heads South, abandoning everything to see her nation freed. Their destination is fixed on the perpetual motion of exile. On her return in eighteen years, the war has not ended; the nation is divided by the liberators who name this division a civil war. She is in the same crowd during the demonstration and is carried in its movement. She moves toward the voices as she feels the tightening crowd. The sounds break as smoke fills the air. Bodies fall, but she still walks, losing direction and crying from the stinging smoke. The streets are covered with debris. She follows the crying crowd, singing through the street. She is chosen as a martyr to the cause, welfare, peace, harmony and progress.

In 1962, the narrator is eleven years old, and Mother pleads with her older brother not to go to the demonstration. He is prepared to join the student demonstration outside, but Mother can hear gunshots which are directed at anyone. On the way home from school, there are cries in every street and from every direction. The shouts reach a crescendo as they near the other side. Permission to use force against the students is dispatched, and the students are beaten, shot or carted off. Mother does not want to lose her son to be killed like so many others. She pleads with him, sending the narrator to Uncle's house to call the tutor. The tutor returns to the house with the narrator and tells her brother that he cannot join the demo because they kill any student in uniform. Brother protests that he is willing to die for his cause, and the tutor hits him. Brother's head falls; he is the same as all the rest as he too died that day. Brother was heard after it was all over. The victory was mixed with the rain that fell for several days afterward. "Rain does not erase the blood fallen on the ground." The pavement is stained and remains dark where they fell.



Eighteen years pass, and the narrator returns for the first time in eighteen years. She speaks another language now; this is how distant she is from that time and place, but the site takes her back to that exact time. No one faces her in the street which is nothing but rubble. She cries, imagining two school children running through the gas. She passes a curve in the road where soldiers sit, hidden in the trees in camouflage. The soldiers wait for movement to urge them into action and relieve their boredom. They hide and hear nothing. They want to kill the time that is oppression itself. There are only names without images, and anonymous others take her place. Nation fights against nation; what was once whole is now divided into two. Human breaths diminish too quickly. Nations fight against nations against themselves. This repels and rejects her from her own. Her own is offspring and Mother, Demeter and Sibyl. Her violation of giving names justifies the violation. There are no gods or devils in the labyrinth of deceptions. The narrator appeals to Melpomene to exorcise from this mouth the name, words and memory of severance and to utter one, through this act, "she without the separate act of uttering."

Melpomene: Tragedy Analysis

The fourth section of "Dictee" is named after Melpomene who is the ancient Greek Muses of Tragedy; this foreshadows the tragic nature of the work within this section. The section begins with a map of Korea after it has been divided into two countries, North Korea and South Korea. On April 19, 1968, the narrator writes to her mother that nothing has changed in eighteen years. The migration of the birds from the North to the South becomes a metaphor for longing to return home. The woman protects the child from battle and war, showing the horrors of war and the maternal instinct of the woman. The endlessness of war is highlighted by the fact that there is no destination except another refuge from another war. The exile is not in vain because Korea gains her freedom. Forsaking all to see her nation freed demonstrates her patriotism.

The narrator's statement that she also fights a war parallels her mother's fighting against Japan; unlike her mother, the war of the narrator's time is a civil war. She joins the demonstration, refusing surrender because she has chosen to be a martyr. In a flashback to 1962, eighteen years ago, Mother pleads with the narrator's older brother not to go to the demonstration because the soldiers are killing everyone wearing a school uniform, such as he wears. This demonstrates the cruelty in war of killing students who are symbolic of the future. This also shows Mother's love for her son. Brother claims that dying is part of the cause, showing his patriotism and willingness to die for his country. When Brother's head falls, the narrator claims that he also died that day. It is unclear if this means he went to the demonstration anyway or that a piece of him died. After eighteen years, the narrator returns to her home to find things unchanged. She is oppressed by the memories, and a simile compares time to oppression. The narrator refuses to become discarded oblivion and appeals to Melpomene to exorcise the names, word and memory from her mouth.



Erato: Love Poetry

Erato: Love Poetry Summary

She enters between two white, stone columns. The columns are worn and abrasive. She pulls the two doors open toward her with her right hand, and they close behind her as she purchases a ticket after waiting in line. She sees that it is 6:35 p.m. and hands the ticket to the usher before climbing the steps into the room. The whiteness of the screen takes her back nearly half of a step. She proceeds to the front and sits close to the screen. On her left sits another woman who was in her place yesterday. She enters the screen from the left before the titles fade in and out. The white subtitles continue across the bottom of the screen before the titles and names appear in the top right corner, each letter moving downward onto the white screen. "She is drawn to the white, then the black. The shadows move across in the whiteness, dark shapes and dark light." The white stone columns are abrasive and worn. The white screen takes her backward. She is drawn to the white then the black. The shadows move across the whiteness. The beginning scene of this section is reiterated from the point of view of a camera watching her, alternating between close ups and long shots. Her mouth moves incessantly and precisely. She forms the words that are heard as they move from her mouth to the ear. She places her hands across the other's lips as she forms the words. She forms the words with her mouth, shaping her lips and blowing the words out. She hears but will see if she has to see. She should wait to see for a second time, another time, but the pace is too fast for another to follow.

One expects her to be beautiful based on the title that does not make her anonymous or plain. One already imagines her before the title. She is not seen immediately, yet her image suspends in one's mind. One is shown the outside of the house in which she lives and then invited inside as a guest. Her portrait is seen through her belongings. Her portrait is not represented in a still photograph or a painting; she is seen all along without actually appearing. "You do not see her yet. For the moment, you see only her traces." A Letter of Invitation to the Wedding of Sister Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is sent. They are unable to invite anyone to the Nuptial Blessing which occurred on Mount Carmel on September 8, 1890 to which only the heavenly court was admitted, but they request their presence at the Return from the Wedding which is to occur on the Day of Eternity when Jesus will come to Earth to judge the living and the dead. All should be prepared since the hour is uncertain. Until then, others relay her story. Her husband is unfaithful because he is a man and it is a given. The distance between husband and wife is that between Heaven and Hell. The husband enters the house, yelling her name. He taunts and humiliates her as she kneels beside him, taking her place. It is a given. On the night of her father's wake, she mourns, but he leaves the room. She falls to the floor, and the onlooker watches the water drip into a well so that they do not have to watch her cry. The narrator does not understand why women are so easily excommunicated in Italy. Jesus allows women to be misunderstood on earth, but "in heaven, He will show that His thoughts are not men's thoughts, for then the last will be first."



She moves slowly and gradually. Stillness follows when she closes the door. She moves in silence's pauses because she cannot disturb the silence. She climbs the steps as dawn changes to day to dusk to moonlight. It takes her all day to climb the steps. The watcher knows how she feels; it is them in her place. "You are she, she speaks to you, you speak her, she cannot speak." She begins playing the piano and asks them to sing a song. The watcher sits next to her and sings as she plays. Mother takes the child and husband from her back to her breast because their hunger is her own. They take away her pain with their nourishment. The narrator is only a powerless child, yet her weakness gives her the boldness to offer herself as a victim of Jesus' love. "Jesus, I know that love is repaid by love alone so to solace my heart, I must give you Love for Love." Perhaps, she loved her husband despite having an arranged marriage to a stranger. Perhaps she learned to love him, or maybe it was never a question but a given. She took what he gave her because he gave so little. "She deserved so little. Being wife. How it was."

Women are never to question or expect. She is his wife, his possession, and she belongs to him. She could not refuse him. Maybe that is how it was then, and maybe that is how it is now. The husband is the one who touches, not as husband, but with his rank as he touches all of the others. Her body is a non-entity. His ownership is infallible and mocking as "her very being dares to name herself as if she possesses her own will." Whether it is one morning or the next does not matter since so many pass in the same way, especially this one. The white mist gathers and disperses; this is how it fills the screen.

She tries to forget for the moment. She opens the white cloth again where the subtle hues outlines barely appear, and then they disappear into the whiteness. There are folds permanently marked in the cloth which was once purposed to make a quilt but left unattended until some future time. She sits and spreads it, looking at it uneasily as if unable to remember a portion of this habitual gesture. To move her body, to no longer renounce her will, stings her. She changes her dress and moves quickly. One follows her as she leaves the frame empty, into the mist. She is buried there, and one loses her. They recall her name, and she appears out of the mist, far away on top of a hill where she has been seen many times before. She visits the lake often. The waiter greets her early in the morning and offers to bring her tea. One follows the waiter inside as he prepares the tea and then returns with him to find her gone. The waiter runs back and forth, calling her name. "The smallest act of PURE LOVE is of more value to her than all other works together." The narrator's childhood dream is martyrdom, and it grows within Carmel's cloisters, but it is folly because she cannot confine herself to one type of martyrdom. She would be scourged, crucified, flayed, and plunged into boiling oil like the martyrs before her. She wants to understand the tortures inflicted upon all martyrs. She presents her neck to the sword and whispers Jesus' name as the stake. It snows in the interval. The words fall. The luminescent substance is more so in the black night. Memory is a fugitive in enclosed darkness. It takes long ages in the weightless snow. There is no distinction as her body becomes his.



Erato: Love Poetry Analysis

The fifth section of this book is titled to allude to Erato who is the ancient Greek Muse of Lyric Poetry. This section begins with a photo of a woman in a garden on crutches. The theme most prevalent in this section is the oppression of women, causing this picture to suggest spousal abuse. The first three narratives in the poem describe the same event from different points of view. The woman enters the theatre and the fact that she another woman were there yesterday, only switching seats, indicates a repetition and possibly boredom in the woman's life. The white subtitles are contrasted to the black screen. The next description eliminates the majority of the action, focusing instead on the contrast of the white columns and white screen compared to the black shadows, dark shapes and dark light. The next description shows the woman's movements as seen through a camera.

The next woman forms words with her mouth, emphasizing her silence as she hears, sees and waits but does not speak. She slows, however, for the narrator to follow her. The next woman is presumed to be beautiful because of the title. When visiting her house, one sees her portrait through her belongings rather than in a still photograph or a painting. This signifies that the physical attributes do not account for who a person is; their actions and past do. An announcement is sent out to indicated the marriage between Jesus Christ and Sister Therese Martin; this demonstrates the importance of taking her vows to become a nun which is compared to a marriage ceremony. Only the heavenly court was admitted to the actual wedding, but all others are invited to attend their return. This return is the Day of Eternity when all living and dead will be judged by Jesus. This Catholic allusion warns invitees to be prepared for the judgment.

The wife must have love and duty to her husband, but the opposite is not required. The husband's infidelity without reason demonstrates the inequality between husband and wife, as does the description of the distance between husband and wife being equal to the distance between Heaven and Hell. The reader turns away to avoid seeing the wife cry at her husband's cruelty, demonstrating the way that society ignores women's suffering. Jesus allows women to be misunderstood on earth in order to be rewarded with the first lot in Heaven. She moves silently and slowly so as not to disturb the man playing the piano. Mothers given themselves to their husbands and children. A wife's duty is to love her husband because she has no choice. This is the way it was then and perhaps still is. The husband owns the wife who is a non-entity; she has no control over her own life. The woman tries to forget her lot in life because it is so painful. The pause and the words signify the fugitive memory. Her body has no distinction and decomposes to becomes the man's, indicating the man's possession of the woman. The final page of this section shows a photograph of a woman's empty, hopeless face.



Elitere: Lyric Poetry

Elitere: Lyric Poetry Summary

Time is dead, and depression is hollow. Both are resistant to memory. She waits. Let the one who is diseased call forth and break open the spell cast upon time, using her voice to penetrate the earth's floor, circle the walls of Tartarus and scratch the bowl's surface. In "Aller/Retour," the day turns to night, and the "translucent grey film cast between daylight and dark dissolving sky to lavender to mauve to white until night overcomes." There is hardly a murmur between dark and night. The secret is suspended in abandoned rooms. The light is removed as day recedes to night. The absence is full and flows; they are left as they are. The water beads in the glass rise to the rim. There is radiance in the immobility of silence as the night reveals the day. This view is finally seen over and over, all the time, as if it is seen for the first time. It was the past, and one is deceived of the view in the stain glass which never reflects. It consequently follows the absent view which has ceased to appear without remembering to sustain a view. It recurs upon itself without the knowledge of its absent view of the other side which must have been a side. Point by point, it is updated, but the view is absent anyway; it is hidden and forbidden on either side of the view which indicates the inside and the outside. It is concealed to void, exhaust and eviscerate what one has seen regarding this view behind the veil. Under the rose, beyond the veil, it is rendered mute and struck dumb, voiceless.

In "Aller," discard every memory which is forgotten so easily. The "colors faintly dust against your vision." Erase them, and fade. Memories vanish, becoming formless, and pretend not to have seen. Start the next line, forget nothing, and resurrect as much as possible, segment by segment. Secrete saliva to form that words that give light, inflaming dimly at first but then increasing. Shut it off before it is too late to be taken away. It takes only one for something to start. Dead, obsolete, forgotten gods dust the exposed layer to reveal the unfathomable well beneath. "Let the one who is diseased again sit upon the stone nine days and nine nights. Thus. Making stand again, Eleusis." In "Retour," the partition is sanded wood between pale sheets of paper. The immobile water seems stagnant. The partition absorbs and filters light as the darkness glows inside it. The atmosphere within it breaks, and the memory attaches itself and stains it. The memory occupies the entire as the certitude of absence erases the present yield to abandon without realizing it. She reads, mouthing the transformed object as the screen absorbs and filters the light. The white turns transparent as words are uttered behind the partition. The distance is unaccountable. It retains itself, unattainably pure, and all memory leaves through the power and absolution of covert, hidden words. Dead words are buried in time's memory. The one is diseased, mother or daughter, should restore memory. The ink spills thickest before it ceases to write at all.



Elitere: Lyric Poetry Analysis

The next section of "Dictee" is subtitled Lyric Poetry since Elitere is the ancient Greek Muse of Music. This section begins with a photograph of a large gathering of Asian women who appear to be yelling. Time is dead and resistant to memory. This section contains several allusions to "the one who is disease," repeating this terminology from the opening of the book. "Aller/Retour" contrasts the light and dark as night overtakes the day. The next page is written half in French and half in English, but the following page is an English translation of the first half of the preceding page. People are deceived in the past which is personified as the past forgets. There is a separation of inside and outside by the veil. The woman is struck mute. In "Aller," the memory is discarded, and whites, colors and black are compared and contrasted. All of the parts combine to form the whole, paralleling the recollection that is assembled piece by piece. This leads to the flow of words.

The allusion to the dead, obsolete gods is followed by the narrator's appeal to Eleusis, the original name for Elitere, to make them whole. Another allusion to "the one who is disease" follows this appeal. The narrator alludes to nine days and nine nights, a repetition from the opening in which the novena of the Immaculate Conception was described; this also signifies the importance of the number nine within this work. "Retour" shows a partition that stands, absorbing and filtering light. The memory changes, becoming formless. The words must be behind the partition if they are to be uttered, demonstrating the need for the words to be screened and hidden. The words are dead from disuse, a pun on "disease." "The one who is disease" is indicated as a mother and daughter which is followed by another allusion to nine days and nine nights. The ink spills thickest before running dry and ceasing to write at all. Elitere ends with a sketch that appears to be dry earth but is indistinguishable.



Thalia: Comedy

Thalia: Comedy Summary

She takes the call at once as if for the very first time. When the call is announced by ringing, she does not think but picks it up without having time to think. All is prepared beforehand to the brief pause before she would say "yes." She speaks in a barely audible voice until she cannot contain any longer and muffles through the upstairs door through another door. She announces her arrival with anticipation. She wishes this person would change back into the person they used to be. It takes less time for her to realize that there will be no magical shifting. She wants to quickly abolish the ritual; there will be no more rehearsals or memorization. There is no end in sight that might appease. She charts each moment as if the act would release her from the antiphony to follow. She searches her words for an equivalence of her feelings. There is no future, only an onslaught of time towards which she is expected to move. She says she could displace time and death could never come, knowing that "there was no displacing death, there was no overcoming without the actual dying." She could continue to live and abolish time if she could continue to write without ceasing. She would live if she could display it before her and become its voyeur.

In a letter to Mrs. Laura Claxton, dated April 22, 1915, H. J. Small states that Mr. Reardon no longer lives here. Small cannot advise of Reardon's current address but will advise if he hears from him. In "memory," the woman with crazy eyes stares unblinkingly at the profile next to her. Helpless as a child, she speaks the truth of her folly as her hand barely climbs from her hair to her lips which are chafed by the cold. She touches her lips, her eyes close, and she reaches for the pen in her pocket. She rests her finger there, smiling. He pays her no attention, turning away. She removes her hand from the pen, cries her folly and stands at the doorway. She is left at the gate as the man disappears. She leans against the door, turning her back to day and her folly. In "second memory," underclothing is layered by outer garments on top. This signifies the consecrated virginity which will not be unforgettable. It would be the most memorable of all to follow. "Imagination harbors the desire of the object to unlimited repetition at each point from the beginning to the middle to the end." The illusion of variation hides upon the nakedness as all before and to come, like birth and death. Unlike birth and death, this is redeemed through a future, a past and its own memory; it presumes a separate conclusion.

A friend of her sister's writes Laura Claxton on August 16, 1920 regarding the fact that her sister is in awful shape and threatens suicide. Her husband and children have done all that they can, spending all of their money on a doctor who cannot do her any good. She does not eat because she spends all of her money on doctors. This friend asks Laura Claxton to send money to her sister so that she can eat. "Memory" occurs in an empty, familiar theatre between seances. Her steps are carefully measured as the darkness resumes. She is the same, sitting four rows from the front in the second seat from the left. Her body is still, and her mouth is parted. She does not notice the other



people in the theatre. This is her second day in the theatre, and she sits in the same place, in silence with her hands folded on her lap. She does not follow the progression of the narrative, submitting only to the timelessness in her body. She refuses banishment and refuses to die. She remains for the effect induced in her. She knows all along how it is not easily believed. She knows without a doubt what she must say but regrets her words afterward while the words return their own obligation. She does not account for the sake of history but to survive the forgotten. She would return to time itself, to time before time, to the one death which takes place before the annunciation of the second coming, before Heaven and birth even. Heaven's ultimate unity includes Earth within itself. Heaven is not Heaven without Earth. Time appeals toward the movement as she returns to the word and its moving silence.

Thalia: Comedy Analysis

The seventh section of "Dictee" alludes to Thalia, the ancient Greek Muse of Comedy, foreshadowing the contents of the section somewhat ironically. This section begins with a sketch of a Greek woman, possibly Thalia herself, holding a comedy mask. The first narrative states that she takes the call, but her words are rehearsed. Her voice is soft and choked from disuse, but it grows louder because she cannot contain any more. She wants to change the other person, though she knows that it is impossible. The past and memorization would end if she could change them, but there is no end in sight. She searches in vain for the words to equal her feelings. There is no future for her; she feels that she can find immortality through continual writing.

Following this is a letter to Laura Claxon from H. J. Smalls which claims no knowledge of where Mr. Reardon is currently living. In "memory," the crazed woman is like a child. She touches the pen in her pocket, indicating that she finds comfort in writing since she cannot speak her words aloud. She turns her back on her folly, possibly the thought that she can speak through writing. "Second memory" focuses on virginity, memory and imagination. A handwritten letter to Laura Claxon comes from her sister's friend who claims that her sister is suicidal and going crazy. She request money for food since her sister spends all of her money on inept doctors. "Memory" recalls the woman in the theatre from the beginning of Erato. She submits to the timelessness in her body, refusing to die. She desires to return to time itself and returns to the word and silence. The fact that Heaven is not Heaven without Earth within it reiterates the earlier claim that the parts combine to make the whole.



Terpsichore: Choral Dance

Terpsichore: Choral Dance Summary

The person addressed remains dismembered with the belief that the magnolia blooms white even on seemingly dead branches. She remains apart from the congregation. She waits during its chaste, silent, dark conception. She waits for the silence to break. She shivers just as the flower bursts and scatters suddenly. There is no retreat, movement or sound. There is no access to sight inside the atmosphere. The air is thick, heavy and inert without the knowledge of its enduring. It does not wait because it has no knowledge of wait. It is full and cannot contain any longer. There is silence within the moments of the eclipse as light is concealed. Time prescribes nothing and reveals the rate of the movement. It withholds brilliance and waits to break. Nothing enters now as it augments without increase. There is a slight mutation of word which begins in media res. There is no movement or sound as she holds silver in her hand. Voice replaces sound. It stops and rests in the center of her palm, and she turns south, north, west and east as the noise or speech starts again. She seeks the night in order to render the air pure. She stores her tears before they fall; she is atoned by her tears. It nearly starts but stops. It can do without pauses and stillness. The earth is a dark stone where moisture settles evenly. "You induce the stone by offering exchange of your own. Own flesh." She cries in supplication to the god to barter her sight and use her speech as ransom.

She sits through the dust and waits, formless, blind and mute, clinging to the sight of the hours accumulating without prosper. Earth becomes porous as half a name passes, letter by letter. The view opens and comes forth, and all around witness it. She emerges and looks forth at the colors. Speech is broken, and she is immaterial and formless now since she has surrendered all parts of her body to dissolution. She prepares for communion when a larger body will inhabit this body. She stands alone without hands, feet or wings. It continues with nothing to change or break the fullness. It takes the identity of duration without a visible mark of the transition. Time is lost until it is forgotten how it stays and endures. A new sign of moisture appears in the barren column that had congealed to stone. It collects water and floods the stones from within. The labor of figures and the voices inscribed to stone form a single stone. The water inhabits the stone, and the inscription resonates, repeating the same words as other melodies are still in the silence. The surface water catches the lights and "renders voices to meet the weight of the stone with the weight of voices." Muted colors appear and stain the wall. The pigment of the stains spills from within until it falls in a single stroke of color. All rise at once, one by one, and the voices are absorbed into sound. The voices spiral in pools until they are no longer audible in order to raise all memory and echo.

Terpsichore: Choral Dance Analysis

The penultimate section of "Dictee" is subtitled "Choral Dance" since it is dedicated to Terpsichore, the Greek Muse of Dance. The first page of this section contains ten lines



with two Asian characters on each line. Terpsichore begins with her separation from the congregation due to her faith which is demonstrated by waiting. She waits in silence though she has no knowledge of the concept of waiting. Time is a constant factor in this section as in all of the preceding sections. Light and dark are contrasted as they have been so many times before. Nothing increases the fullness though it continues to grow; this seeming oxymoron indicates that the fullness grows of its own accord. There is no sound or movement which is replaced with the voice, a sound. Time stops and allusions are made to the directions: North, West, South and East. The seasons change, and noise as speech resumes. She barter her form to the Earth and becomes formless as time continues and Earth changes. The written word appears more important than her physical form. Immaterial and formless, she loses her limbs. The moisture appears in the column as the weight of the voices meet the weight of stone; the voices are lost as they are absorbed into the stone. This seems to be a metaphor for women's voices being lost in the world of men.



Polymnia: Sacred Poetry

Polymnia: Sacred Poetry Summary

She remembers drinking from this well once. A young woman fills two large jars as she approaches after walking very far during the hot summer. She sees the figure at the well in the distance, performing the gesture with precision and speed. An echo becomes audible as she nears the well. She does not look at the young girl who carries a small white bundle in her hand. The girl opens her mouth as if to speak but sits down in the shade without saying a word, seemingly cooled by the proximity of the well. She sighs and closes her eyes which have become unfocused from the heat and the dust. She opens her eyes to see the pools of spilled water surrounding the well. The girl speaks a sequence of words, her mouth hanging open after the last as though she does not realize that she has spoken. She watches the woman fill the bucket. The woman fills a bowl with water and gives it to the girl to drink. The girl drinks the water and looks at the smiling woman whose eyes seem "to glow from inside the darkness." The girl offers a timid smile in return as her arms hug her knees and her hands grip the bowl. The woman asks why the girl is so far from home and learns that the girl is on her way to a neighboring village to procure remedies for her ailing mother. She begins walking at daybreak and does not want to stop, but she comes to the well because she is so tired and thirsty. The woman brings her basket with her as she sits next to the girl. She pulls pockets, drawn with black string, out of the basket and hands them to the child. She instructs the child on how to prepare these special remedies for her mother. The woman takes off her kerchief and places the bowl in the center with the pockets inside; then she ties the kerchief into a small bundle which she hands to the girl. She tells the girl that she must serve the remedies inside the bowl, and, after completing her instructions, she is to keep the bowl and the tenth pocket as a gift. The woman tells the girl to go home quickly without stopping and to remember all that she has told her. The girl thanks her, stands and bows. She walks away rapidly, her steps lighter than before. She turns back to wave, but the woman is nowhere in sight. Recalling the woman's prohibition against stopping, the girl runs until her village comes into view. Through the door, dusk has entered, and a small candle flickers.

Tai-Chi is the universe. Leung Yee is Ying and Yang. Sam Choy is Heaven, Earth and Humans. Say Cheung is the Cardinals, North, South, East and West. Ng Hang is the five elements: metal, wood, water, fire and earth. Lok Hop is the four cardinals, zenith and nadir. Chut Sing is the seven stars that compose the Big Dipper. Bat Gwa is the eight diagrams. Gow Gee Lin Wan is an unending series of nines or nine points linked together. Chung Wai is a series of concentric circles. Indisputably, the words are cast to weather and time. "If it should impress, make fossil trace of word, residue of word, stand as a ruin stands, simply, as mark having relinquished itself to time to distance." The child appeals to her mother to lift her up to the window above her vision so that she can see the muted light and the houses in the pools of passing light. The ruelle is an endless path turning the corner behind the last house. The walls reflect the white of the rays, and the trees adhere to the silence of the view. The child begs to be lifted to the



window as the ropes that tie the weights of the stones are unleashed, scraping on the wood to break the stillness as the bells peal and hold the weight to break the stillness.

Polymnia: Sacred Poetry Analysis

The final section of "Dictee" is subtitled Sacred Poetry, alluding to Polymnia, the ancient Greek muse of Choral Poetry. The section begins with a desert landscape containing columns and tree stumps. The first narrative in Polymnia describes the interaction between a young woman and a young girl at a well. The girls' role is reversed in this narrative as she intends to provide for her ailing mother. Tired, the girl rests. Both women are silent at first, until the girl speaks without seeming to realize it. The woman nurtures the girl by giving her water. The girl explains her mission, and the woman gives the girl remedies for her mother and a gift for the girl. The girl heeds the woman's advice, but the woman has vanished when the girl turns to wave goodbye, suggesting that the woman may be a goddess rather than a human. Dusk enters the house and a small candle flickers as the girl returns home; this seems to suggest that the girl's mother is near death. Throughout this narrative, both the young woman and the young girl are referred to as "she" which can be confusing as one sentence may refer to one while the next refers to the other without distinguishing the transition.

The next page describes Asian phrases and seems to indicate the ten phases of creation, beginning with the universe and ending with concentric circles. The tenth phases is repeated on the following page, indicating the importance of the never-ending circles. The words relinquish themselves to time and distance, two repetitive entities in this book. The child begging her mother to life her to the window indicates her desire to see and hear outside, to escape from her role within society.



Characters

Unnamed appears in Dictee

Throughout "Dictee" the majority of the characters are simply an unidentified female. The author does not specify if this "she" is supposed to be the same or different women. It is unknown if it should even be viewed as an individual or as the embodiment of women. In the Opening, she comes from far, and at dinner her family asks about her first day. She answers "there is but one there... there is someone." In "Disease," she mimics the gestures of speaking with her mouth, but the breath falls away. She gathers her strength and remains in this position as the pain of speech fosters inside of her. She swallows in preparation. It augments, and she swallows against the pain that wishes it to speak. She allows others to occupy her barren cavities. There might be an echo when the amplification stops, and then she might make an attempt at the pause in the echo. She "waits inside the pause. Inside her." The pause ends, and the voice wraps another, thicker layer from the waiting and the pain to say or to not say. She waits to absorb and deliver their punctuation. She relays the recitation. The weight evenly presses down the back of her head to the front, causing her to gasp from its pressure and contracting motion. It does not contain any more voices. It rises, floods and dissolves her. The above traces from her head to her mouth, turning her inside out. It begins imperceptibly, and she takes the pause slowly. The time and the pause are now bare, and they belong to her. During communion, a woman kneels, sticks out her tongue and receives Him as she prays.

In Melpomene, she sits in the first few rows to better ignore the others and to have a better view, more face to face with the screen. The lights fade until it is dark. She stretches out as far as possible until her neck rests on the back of the seat, and she pulls her coat up to her chin, covering her entire body. She watches the moving shades and the flickering light through the windows. In Erato, she enters between two white, stone columns. She pulls the two doors open toward her with her right hand, and they close behind her as she purchases a ticket after waiting in line. She sees that it is 6:35 p.m. and hands the ticket to the usher before climbing the steps into the room. The whiteness of the screen takes her back nearly half of a step. She proceeds to the front and sits close to the screen. On her left sits another woman who was in her place yesterday. She enters the screen from the left before the titles fade in and out. The white subtitles continue across the bottom of the screen before the titles and names appear in the top right corner, each letter moving downward onto the white screen. "She is drawn to the white, then the black. The shadows move across in the whiteness, dark shapes and dark light." The white stone columns are abrasive and worn. The white screen takes her backward. She is drawn to the white then the black. The shadows move across the whiteness. Her mouth moves incessantly and precisely. She forms the words that are heard as they move from her mouth to the ear. She places her hands across the other's lips as she forms the words. She forms the words with her mouth, shaping her lips and blowing the words out. She hears but will see if she has to see.



She should wait to see for a second time, another time, but the pace is too fast for another to follow.

One expects her to be beautiful based on the title that does not make her anonymous or plain. One already imagines her before the title. She is not seen immediately, yet her image suspends in one's mind. One is shown the outside of the house in which she lives and then invited inside as a guest. Her portrait is not represented in a still photograph or a painting; she is seen all along without actually appearing. "You do not see her yet. For the moment, you see only her traces." Until then, others relay her story. Her husband is unfaithful because he is a man and it is a given. The husband taunts and humiliates her as she kneels beside him, taking her place. It is a given. On the night of her father's wake, she mourns, but he leaves the room. She falls to the floor, and the onlooker watches the water drip into a well so that they do not have to watch her cry. She moves slowly and gradually. Stillness follows when she closes the door. She moves in silence's pauses because she cannot disturb the silence. She climbs the steps as dawn changes to day to dusk to moonlight. It takes her all day to climb the steps. The watcher knows how she feels; it is them in her place. They accompany her to school as a young girl. "You are she, she speaks to you, you speak her, she cannot speak." She goes to the piano as he plays his own composition. The watcher knows how it was for her and knows what she will do. She begins playing and asks them to sing a song. The watcher sits next to her and sings as she plays.

Perhaps, she loved her husband despite having an arranged marriage to a stranger. Perhaps she learned to love him, or maybe it was never a question but a given. She took what he gave her because he gave so little. "She deserved so little. Being wife. How it was." Women are never to question or expect. She is his wife, his possession, and she belongs to him. She could not refuse him. Maybe that is how it was then, and maybe that is how it is now. The husband is the one who touches, not as husband, but with his rank as he touches all of the others. Her body is a non-entity. His ownership is infallible and mocks her refusal as "her very being dares to name herself as if she possesses her own will." Whether it is one morning or the next does not matter since so many pass in the same way, especially this one. The white mist rises everywhere. It gathers and disperses; this is how it fills the screen. She tries to forget for the moment. She opens the white cloth again where the subtle hues outlines the phoenix, facing each other in the weave. They barely appear, and then they disappear into the whiteness. There are folds permanently marked in the cloth which was once purposed to make a quilt but left unattended until some future time. She sits and spreads it, looking at it uneasily as if unable to remember a portion of this habitual gesture. To move her body, to no longer renounce her will, stings her. She changes her dress and moves quickly. One follows her as she leaves the frame empty, into the mist. She is buried there, and one loses her. They recall her name, and she appears out of the mist, far away on top of a hill where she has been seen many times before. She visits the lake often. The waiter greets her early in the morning and offers to bring her tea. Everything is seen from above as the two figures move constantly. One follows the waiter inside as he prepares the tea and then returns with him to find her gone. The waiter runs back and forth, calling her name. There is no distinction as her body becomes his.



In Elitere, she waits. She reads, mouthing the transformed object as the screen absorbs and filters the light. The white turns transparent as words are uttered behind the partition. The one is disease, mother or daughter, should restore memory. In Thalia, she takes the call at once as if for the very first time. When the call is announced by ringing, she does not think but picks it up without having time to think. All is prepared beforehand to the brief pause before she would say "yes." Each phrase is pronounced to highlight the objects that follow them. She speaks in a barely audible voice until she cannot contain any longer and muffles through the upstairs door through another door. She announces her arrival with anticipation. She wishes this person would change back into the person they used to be. It takes less time for her to realize that there will be no magical shifting. She wants to quickly abolish the ritual; there will be no more rehearsals or memorization.

There is no end in sight that might appease. She charts each moment as if the act would release her from the antiphony to follow. She searches her words for an equivalence of her feelings. There is no future, only an onslaught of time towards which she is expected to move. She says she could displace time and death could never come, knowing that "there was no displacing death, there was no overcoming without the actual dying." She could continue to live and abolish time if she could continue to write without ceasing. She would live if she could display it before her and become its voyeur. One might say she was crazy in her eyes which unblinkingly fix on the profile next to her. She is as helpless as a child. She speaks the truth of her folly as her hand barely climbs from her hair to her lips which are chafed by the cold. She touches her lips, her eyes close, and she reaches for the pen in her pocket. She rests her finger there, smiling. He pays her no attention, turning away. She removes her hand from the pen, cries her folly and stands at the doorway. She is left at the gate as the man disappears. She leans against the door, turning her back to day and her folly.

In "Memory", her steps are carefully measured as the darkness resumes. She is the same, sitting four rows from the front in the second seat from the left. Her body is still, and her mouth is parted. She does not notice the other people in the theatre. This is her second day in the theatre, and she sits in the same place, in silence with her hands folded on her lap. She does not follow the progression of the narrative, submitting only to the timelessness in her body. She refuses banishment and refuses to die. She remains for the effect induced in her. She knows all along how it is not easily believed. She knows without a doubt what she must say but regrets her words afterward while the words return their own obligation. She does not account for the sake of history but to survive the forgotten. She would return to time itself, to time before time, to the one death which takes place before the annunciation of the second coming, before Heaven and birth even.

In Terpischore, she remains apart from the congregation. She waits during its chaste, silent, dark conception. She waits for the silence to break. She shivers just as the flower bursts and scatters suddenly. There is no movement or sound as she holds silver in her hand. Voice replaces sound. It stops and rests in the center of her palm, and she turns south, north, west and east as the noise or speech starts again. She seeks the night in order to render the air pure. She stores her tears before they fall; she is atoned by her



tears. She cries in supplication to the god to barter her sight and use her speech as ransom. She sits through the dust and waits, formless, blind and mute, clinging to the sight of the hours accumulating without prosper. She emerges and looks forth at the colors. Speech is broken, and she is immaterial and formless now since she has surrendered all parts of her body to dissolution. She prepares for communion when a larger body will inhabit this body. She stands alone without hands, feet or wings.

Narrator appears in Dictee

The narrator of "Dictee" is the author, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. She narrates the poems and the stories in the book. In the Opening, the narrator appeals to the Muse to tell the story, beginning where she wishes. The narrator again makes an invocation without addressing anyone. The narrator makes up sins during Confession in order to guarantee absolution. In a question and answer format, the narrator reveals that God made thee, God is everywhere, and God has made everyone in his own likeness. In Calliope, the narrator addresses her mother, Hyung Soon Huo as she retells her mother's history. The narrator writes her mother daily from here. If she is not writing, she composes a letter in her thoughts. "You are here I raise the voice." The narrator has the documents. One day, she raises her right hand, becomes American and is given an American passport. When she returns to her native country, she is no longer one of them. They question her about her identity and the reason for her return. She sees the unchanged and the unchangeable but is unable to speak. Nearly crying, she nearly says "I know you I know you, I have waited to see you for long this long." After they check each article and question her on foreign articles, they dismiss her.

In Urania, the nurse takes the narrator's left arm, tells her to make a fist and then open her hand to make the vein appear. She ties an elastic band tightly around her arm and presses a thumb against her flesh. She moves the elastic to the right arm and repeats the procedure, finding a vein. The nurse rubs alcohol on the narrator's arm with a cotton swab. The coolness disappears as the liquid evaporates. She takes the needle to the skin and extracts a sample. It appears in a flow all of a sudden, collecting and spilling over. The contents are housed in the membranes. It is enough now; the empty body waiting to contain is filled, and the nurse pulls the needle out. The blood flows suddenly in one line down the arm onto the table. It takes only seconds for the nurse to break the needle off its body and collect the blood directly from the wound. The "stain begins to absorb the material spilled on." She pushes cotton against the mark hard, and blood empties upon the surface. It is ever possible to expel the blood from a body. The narrator heard the swans in the rain and listened to the spoken, but it is impossible to say if it is true. The memory of what was said is remembered, but she is not quite certain what she heard. The rain dreamed from sounds and the pauses, and it is impossible to distinguish speech. The tongue, mouth, throat and lungs are assembled as one organ. Returning later, the narrator is unsure if it was the rain, speech or memory as it diminishes itself. She bites the tongue until no organ is left; she cries. A little at a time, the silence draws nearer filling the pages and lines with void words and silences. She hears the mute signs, but they are never the same. As she listens to the



signs in the rain, it is impossible to say whether it is true or not, impossible to distinguish the audible from signs, speech and memory which is uncertain.

In Melpomene, the narrator writes her mother on April, 19th, eighteen years later from Seoul, Korea. They are at a standstill; nothing has changed. She still speaks in a foreign tongue. They have been away all this time but nothing has changed. It is not June 25, 1950, and no bombs fall. "Every bird that migrates North for Spring and South for Winter becomes a metaphor for the longing of return. Destination. Homeland." No longer do women with children lift the barriers all night, waiting for the battles to come. There is no destination except another refuge from another war. Generations and deceptions pass in the approach to the destination. She knew that thirty-six years in exile would not be in vain and that some day her country would be her own. The day finally comes as Japan is defeated in the World War, and she returns to her country. As soon as she hears, she heads South without anything to remember, abandoning everything to see her nation freed. Their destination is fixed on the perpetual motion of exile.

On her return in eighteen years, the war is not ended; the nation is divided by the liberators who name this division a civil war. She is in the same crowd during the demonstration and is carried in its movement. She moves toward the voices as she feels the tightening crowd. The sounds break as smoke fills the air. Bodies fall, but she still walks, losing direction and crying from the stinging smoke. The streets are covered with debris, such as the shoes that contain no sign of who wore them except for the blood that the rain cannot wash away. She follows the crying crowd, singing through the street. She is chosen as a martyr to the cause, welfare, peace, harmony and progress. In 1962, the narrator is eleven years old, and Mother pleads with her older brother not to go to the demonstration and sends her daughter to retrieve the tutor who tries to dissuade her brother from going to the demonstration. Eighteen years pass, and the narrator returns for the first time in eighteen years. She speaks another language now; this is how distant she is from that time and place, but the site takes her back to that exact time. No one faces her in the street which is nothing but rubble. She cries, imagining two school children running through the gas. She passes a curve in the road where soldiers sit, hidden in the trees in camouflage. The narrator appeals to Melpomene to exorcise from this mouth the name, words and memory of severance and to utter one, through this act, "she without the separate act of uttering."

In Erato, the narrator does not understand why women are so easily excommunicated in Italy. The poor women are misunderstood, and yet they love God in much larger numbers than men. Jesus allows women to be misunderstood on earth, but "in heaven, He will show that His thoughts are not men's thoughts, for then the last will be first." The narrator is only a powerless child, yet her weakness gives her the boldness to offer herself as a victim of Jesus' love. For love to be fully satisfied, it must lower itself into nothingness and transform this into fire. "Jesus, I know that love is repaid by love alone so to solace my heart, I must give you Love for Love." The narrator's childhood dream is martyrdom, and it grows within Carmel's cloisters, but it is folly because she cannot confine herself to one type of martyrdom. She would be scourged, crucified, flayed, and plunged into boiling oil like the martyrs before her. She wants to understand the tortures inflicted upon all martyrs. She presents her neck to the sword and whispers Jesus'



name as the stake. In Polymnia, the narrator as a child appeals to her mother to lift her up to the window above her vision so that she can see the muted light and the houses in the pools of passing light. The ruelle is an endless path turning the corner behind the last house. The walls reflect the white of the rays, and the trees adhere to the silence of the view. The child begs to be lifted to the window as the ropes that tie the weights of the stones are unleashed, scraping on the wood to break the stillness as the bells peal and hold the weight to break the stillness.

Hyung Soon Huo appears in Calliope

Hyung Soon Huo is Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's mother. She is eighteen years old and was born in Yong Jung, Manchuria. Although she now lives in China, she is Korean, not Chinese. Her parents moved to China to escape the Japanese occupation in Korea. China is large, but she lives in a village with other Korean refugees on land that is not her own. She no longer wants to see what they do to her people. Her parents leave, and she suffers having left though her spirit has not left; her spirit is not in the past but burns. She is a child still at eighteen years old. She has been ill and sheltered for her entire life. Mother speaks the mandatory language because her native tongue is forbidden, but she secretly speaks her mother tongue in the dark; it is her refuge and a way to return home. Speaking saddens her since each word means risking death. She carries the mark at her center; it is the mark of belonging, cause, retrieval by birth, death and blood. She sings of a destitute form standing in the shadow during a summer day as lovely as the virgins that play in her honor. This is the national song that is forbidden. They take her tongue and the choral hymn from her, but she says that it will not be for long. She waits as her spirit alights. The answer will come soon after the offering. She knows to wait for the choral answer. They have not yet forbidden her to see, and she sees further than is allowed. She waits silently, biding her time for thirty-six years. In the days before the reclamation, her mother and father die while uttering their only regret: not seeing the overthrow with their own eyes. Mother writes and speaks to scatter the words.

It is 1940, and she is eighteen years old. She has just graduated college and is going to her first teaching post in a small country village for three years to repay her school loans to Manchuria. She is hardly an adult and has never left her parents' house being the youngest of four children and sheltered. She travels to the village via train, and the villagers, especially the children, stare at her. She is the first female teacher in this village in six years. A male teacher greets her in Japanese. The teachers speak Japanese to each other although they are all Korean. Mother is assigned to the first grade which contains fifty students who must learn to speak their names in Korean and Japanese. She speaks Korean to them because they are too young to understand Japanese. She is alone, and her hardships are immense as she is unaccustomed to the daily life in this village. She sends all of her money home except what is necessary for room and board; she is barely able to eat. Mother takes a train home where she calls her mother from the gate. Her mother rushes to her, bringing her food. She is home because her mother means home to her.



On Sunday afternoon, Hyung Soon Huo must return to school where the students wait to see her home and bring her food. She works Monday through Thursday, but she does not feel well on Friday as she feels herself yielding to them. They force their speech upon her. She is somewhere in this stillness but cannot imagine how. She moves almost imperceptibly inside the stillness. She moves ahead of the movement; she is movement. She comes to an enormous house where women stand in beautiful clothing. She passes the large flower bed and the large hall where women dance. Entranced, she moves toward the restaurant where three women approach her from the opposite direction, carrying large dishes of food which captivate her. Their spirits takes hers, immobilizing her. They smile, offering her food, but she refuses persistently. The third woman pushes her down and says "If you do not eat, you must become a cripple." She falls; her parents hold her hands, and she asks them to unfold her fingers which begin to curl. Her parents cry, saying that the fingers curl when one is about to die. Her father asks how she lives when she does not eat. When she asks for food, they say that the last request of those dying is to eat as they give her food. There is no more exile and no black crows to mourn Mother. Neither Heaven nor Hell takes her; she comes back to her mother and father. The narrator writes her mother daily from here. One day, she raises her right hand, becomes American and is given an American passport. When she returns to her native country, she is no longer one of them. They question her about her identity and the reason for her return. She sees the unchanged and the unchangeable but is unable to speak. Nearly crying, she nearly says "I know you I know you, I have waited to see you for long this long." After they check each article and question her on foreign articles, they dismiss her.

Young Girlappears in Polymnia

The young girl remembers drinking from this well once. Her mother gives her a white kerchief as protection from the sun and the heat that rises from the earth. She sees the figure at the well in the distance, performing the gesture with precision and speed. An echo becomes audible as she nears the well. The girl opens her mouth as if to speak but sits down in the shade without saying a word, seemingly cooled by the proximity of the well. She sighs and closes her eyes which have become unfocused from the heat and the dust. She opens her eyes to see the pools of spilled water surrounding the well. The girl speaks a sequence of words, her mouth hanging open after the last as though she does not realize that she has spoken. She watches the woman fill the bucket. The woman fills a bowl with water and gives it to the girl to drink. The girl drinks the water and looks at the smiling woman whose eyes seem "to glow from inside the darkness."

The girl offers a timid smile in return as her arms hug her knees and her hands grip the bowl. The girl tells the woman that she is on her way to a neighboring village to procure remedies for her ailing mother. She begins walking at daybreak and does not want to stop, but she comes to the well because she is so tired and thirsty. The woman listens, nods and pats the girl's head. She brings her basket with her as she sits next to the girl. She pulls pockets, drawn with black string, out of the basket and hands them to the child. She instructs the child on how to prepare these special remedies for her mother. The woman takes off her kerchief and places the bowl in the center with the pockets



inside; then she ties the kerchief into a small bundle which she hands to the girl. She tells the girl that she must serve the remedies inside the bowl, and, after completing her instructions, she is to keep the bowl and the tenth pocket as a gift. The woman tells the girl to go home quickly without stopping and to remember all that she has told her. The girl thanks her, stands and bows. She walks away rapidly, her steps lighter than before. She turns back to wave, but the woman is already gone. The girl looks around, but the woman is nowhere in sight. Recalling the woman's prohibition against stopping, the girl runs until her village comes into view. She becomes aware of the weight of the bundle and the warmth in her palms where she holds it. Through the door, dusk has entered, and a small candle flickers.

Yu Guan Soon appears in Clio

Yu Guan Soon is born on March 15, 1903 and dies on October 20, 1920 at the age of seventeen. She is born of one mother and one father. She makes her duration complete as others before her have made theirs complete. Yu Guan Soon is the only daughter of four children born to patriot parents. Her actions are exceptional from her youth, and her acts of generosity and self-sacrifice are exchangeable with any heroine in history. In 1919, she is sixteen years old when the Japanese conspire to overthrow the Korean government by killing the royal family. Afterward, Yu Guan Soon forms a resistance and actively begins her revolutionary work. The nationally organized movement does not accept her seriousness as a young woman and tries to dissuade her efforts, but she demonstrates her dedication and is appointed messenger. She organizes the largest collective outcry against the Japanese occupation of the Korean people on March 1, 1919. During this procession, her parents and brothers fall. Yu Guan Soon is arrested as a leader of the rebellion; she is stabbed, imprisoned and questioned but reveals no names. She receives a prison sentence of seven years. She lives on forever through the memory of her courageous actions.

Young Woman appears in Polymnia

A young woman fills two large jars as the girl approaches. She performs the gesture with precision and speed. The young woman also wears a white kerchief and an apron. She does not look at the young girl who carries a small white bundle in her hand. The woman fills the bucket, and then she fills a bowl with water and gives it to the girl to drink. As the woman smiles, her eyes seem "to glow from inside the darkness." The woman asks why the girl is so far from home and learns that the girl is on her way to a neighboring village to procure remedies for her ailing mother. The woman listens, nods and pats the girl's head. She brings her basket with her as she sits next to the girl. She pulls pockets, drawn with black string, out of the basket and hands them to the child. She instructs the child on how to prepare these special remedies for her mother. The woman takes off her kerchief and places the bowl in the center with the pockets inside; then she ties the kerchief into a small bundle which she hands to the girl. She tells the girl that she must serve the remedies inside the bowl, and, after completing her instructions, she is to keep the bowl and the tenth pocket as a gift. The woman tells the



girl to go home quickly without stopping and to remember all that she has told her. When the girl turns back to wave, the woman is already gone.

Muses appears in Opening and throughout Dictee

The Opening invokes the Muse to tell the story, beginning where she wishes. The Muses are goddesses and the daughters of Zeus. The nine sections of "Dictee" are named after the nine Muses. Clio is the Muse of History, Calliope is the Muse of Epic Poetry, and Urania is the Muse of Astronomy. Melpomene is the Muse of Tragedy while Erato is the Muse of Love Poetry. Elitere is the Muse of Music or Lyric Poetry, Thalia is the Muse of Comedy, Terpsichore is the Muse of Choral Dance or Dance, and Polymnia is the Muse of Sacred Poetry.

Crazy Woman appears in Thalia

The crazy woman stares unblinkingly at the profile next to her. She is like a child in her folly. She rests her finger on the pen in her pocket, but she must release the pen when he turns away from her. She stands at the doorway when he leaves her at the gate entry outside. She leans against the door, putting her back to the day and to her folly.

Jesus appears in Opening and Erato

In the Opening, Jesus is the man-God who is invoked by the priest. His crucifixion follows Mea Culpa. In Erato, Jesus marries Sister Therese Martin and will return on the Day of Eternity when he will judge the living and the dead. Jesus allows women to be misunderstood on Earth but will not allow this to be their lot in Heaven.

Laura Claxton appears in Thalia

Laura Claxon receives a letter from H. J. Small that Mr. Reardon no longer lives here. She later receives a letter from her sister's friend that states that her sister fears going crazy and asks for money for food.

Child appears in Erato

The child is powerless and weak, but this weakness allots her the boldness to offer herself as a victim of Jesus' love. She finds that the only way to solace her heart is by giving Jesus love for love.



You appears in Terpsichore

You "remain dismembered with the belief that the magnolia blooms white even on seemingly dead branches." You wait and remain separate from the congregation.

Koreans of Hawaii appears in Clio

The Koreans of Hawaii write an appeal to President Roosevelt to ask the United States of America to assist Korea in ending Japan's oppression.

Older Brother appears in Melpomene

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's older brother wants to join the student demonstration outside, but his mother prevents him because she does not want him to die.

Sister Therese Martin appears in Erato

Sister Therese Martin is the daughter of Monsieur Louis Martin and Mme. Martin who marries Jesus Christ by taking her vows to become a nun.

Mother appears in Erato

The mother takes her child and husband from her back to her breast. They take away her pain with their nourishment.



Objects/Places

France appears in Opening

France is formerly divided into thirty-two provinces, but since the Revolution of 1789, it is divided into eighty-six departments which are named after the rivers, mountains and situation of each department. Each department is administered by a prefect. Paris is the capital of France and the world. French is repetitively used throughout "Dictee."

Novena appears in Opening

The Novena of the Immaculate Conception begins at the end of the Opening. It contains nine each, the recitation of prayer and the practice of devotion during a nine day period.

Japan appears in Clio

Japan occupies and suppresses Korea cruelly. Their power is gained by a treaty of alliance which they use to oppress the Korean people.

Korea appears in Clio

Korea is occupied and controlled by Japan. Many Koreans are exiled.

MAH-UHM appears in Calliope

MAH-UHM is the spirit which has not left Hyung Soon Huo, Cha's mother, though she suffers the knowledge of having left Korea.

Language appears in Calliope

Korean, Hyung Soon Huo's native language, is forbidden, and she is forced to speak Japanese; however, she secretly speaks Korean despite the risk of death if she is caught.

Manchuria appears in Calliope

Hyung Soon Huo lives in Manchuria due to her family's exile from Korea during the Japanese occupation.



United States of America appears in Calliope

The Koreans of Hawaii appeal to President Roosevelt to ask for the United States of America's assistance to save Korea from Japan's occupation and persecution.

Speech appears in Dictee

Speech is used throughout this text as a prevalent theme. It is often contrasted to silence as women are forbidden to speak. "Dictee" deals largely with women's struggle to speak.

Memory appears in Dictee

Memory is repetitively mentioned throughout "Dictee." It is haunting and sometimes evasive, but it is necessary to prevent repeating the mistakes of the past.

Exile appears in Calliope and Melpomene

The Koreans, including Hyung Soon Huo, are exiled due to the Japanese occupation of Korea. This exile is created by war.

Civil War appears in Melpomene

After Japan is expelled from Korea, Korea begins a civil war, and the country separates into two entities, North Korea and South Korea.

Portrait appears in Erato

From the title, one expects her to be beautiful, but her portrait is seen through her belongings rather than as a photograph or painting.

Husband and Wife appears in Erato

The husband is sovereign and owns the wife. The wife is submissive and belongs to the husband.

Love appears in Erato

Love is repaid by love alone. "The smallest act of PURE LOVE is more valuable to her than all other works together."



Martyrdom appears in Erato

Martyrdom is the dream of the narrator's youth which has grown within Carmel's cloisters; however, this dream is folly because she cannot confine herself to one type of martyrdom. She wants to suffer all of the martyrdoms that the saints were subjected to.

Earth appears in Terpsichore

Earth is a dark, blue-black stone upon which moisture settles evenly and flawlessly. It is made porous and heeds inception in darkness.

Well appears in Polymnia

The well is where the young girl encounters the young woman from whom she gets the medicine pockets for her ailing mother.

Bowl appears in Polymnia

The young woman gives the young girl a drink of water from the bowl. She instructs the girl that the medicine pockets must be prepared and served from this bowl which the girl is then to keep as a gift from the young woman.

Medicine Pockets appears in Polymnia

The young woman gives the young girl nine medicine pockets for her sick mother and a tenth as a gift for the girl.



Themes

War and Exile

One of the prevalent themes in "Dictee" is that of the consequences of war, especially exile. The Opening contains a reference to the French Revolution of 1789. Clio provides the history of Japan occupying Korea. The Japanese officials enforce many inexplicable laws. The heroine of this section, Yu Guan Soon, is the daughter of patriot parents. When Japan overthrows the Korean government by killing Queen Min and the royal family, Soon forms a student revolutionary group, but she is disregarded by the national movement because she is female. After demonstrating her dedication, she is appointed as messenger and organizes the largest collective outcry against the Japanese occupation on March 1, 1919. Soon sees four engagements fought, but only one is a Korean victory. In a bad fight eight miles outside of Su-won on September 12, 1907, many volunteers are cruelly killed by the Japanese. Other nations cannot understand this oppression as they are not subjected to it. The narrator explains that it is necessary to resurrect the past in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes in the future. The Koreans of Hawaii appeal to Present Roosevelt on July 12, 1905 to help Korea, leading to the first World War. During a march with the national flag, Soon's parents and brothers are killed while she is arrested and tortured, but she reveals no names during her questioning. She is imprisoned for seven years, but she never dies because the memory of her actions continues.

In Calliope, Hyung Soon Huo and her family are exiled from Korea to Manchuria due to Japan's occupation of Korea. Huo secretly speaks Korean though it is forbidden upon penalty of death. It pains her to leave her homeland. Her parents regret dying before they are able to see the reclamation of Korea. Japan attempts China, and Huo must speak Japanese to the other teachers in the small village in Manchuria. The children must also learn Japanese. In an allusion to the temptation of Christ, Huo refuses to yield to the oppressive forces surrounding her to relinquish her national identity. Cha becomes an American citizen and is questioned upon her return to Korea because she is no longer one of them. In Melpomene, Japan is defeated in World War I, but a civil war outbreaks, and Korea is separated into North Korea and South Korea. Cha participates in the revolution. When Cha is eleven years old, her mother tries to prevent Cha's older brother from joining a student demonstration; Cha says that he dies that day, but it is unclear if he dies physically or his spirit dies by being prevented from joining the demonstration.

Speech and Writing

A very important theme in "Dictee" is the distinction between the written and spoken word as emphasizing women's struggle to speak. The book begins with a quote from Sappho that states "May I write words more naked than flesh, stronger than bone, more resilient than sinew, sensitive than nerve." This quote, along with the appeal to the



Muses, invokes an ancient Western female literary tradition within the book. Throughout "Dictee," there are allusions concerning the grammatical aspects of writing, such as periods, sentences, paragraphs, etc. Another repetitive indication of this theme is the silence, the pauses and the formation of words as opposed to the actual iteration of the words. The narrator continually refers to the one who is diseuse; diseuse refers to a woman who is a skilled and usually professional performer of monologues. In "Diseuse," a poem in the Opening, an unnamed woman mimics the speaking and would take on their punctuation. The French lesson in this portion of the book contains translations about speaking and writing, associating the two. In Calliope, Hyung Soon Huo is unable to speak her mother tongue but does so secretly. Cha writes her mother constantly and "raises the voice."

In Urania, the tongue, mouth, throat and lungs combine to form one speech organ. There is silence, and the narrator urges the reader to "Void the words. Void the silence." During a semblance of speech, the proper pauses stop and start the words. In Melpomene, the narrator appeals to the Muse to "exorcise from this mouth the name the words the memory of severance through this act this very act to utter one." In Erato, the mouth moves, forming words. The wife is silent, speechless and mute. This silence allows the man to possess his wife as an object. In Elitere, the woman is struck dumb, and the narrator encourages her to salivate and secrete the words to enflame. "The ink spills thickest before it runs dry before it stops writing at all." In Thalia, the call is rehearsed and her voice is nearly inaudible but grows louder as she can no longer contain it. She would not die if she were able to write ceaselessly. The crazy woman finds comfort in touching her pen as it offers a way to end the silence. In Terpsichore, the silence grows but is ended with a semblance of speech though the name and the word are forgotten. In Polymnia, the girl at the well is silent until she speaks without seeming to realize it. Words are cast to weather and time as a mark of having relinquished themselves to time and distance. The act of lifting the child to the window to see outside is symbolic of lifting the immobile silence.

Oppression of Women

Possibly the most important and obvious theme in "Dictee" is the oppression of women. The book focuses on several women: Yu Guan Soon, Joan of Arc, Demeter, Persephone, Hyung Soon Huo and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, the author. Furthermore, the book is divided into nine sections each of which are dedicated to one of the nine ancient Greek Muses who are said to inspire the arts. This invokes the presence of an ancient Western female literary tradition. Adding to this invocation is the beginning quote from Sappho that states "May I write words more naked than flesh, stronger than bone, more resilient than sinew, sensitive than nerve." Repeatedly, Cha expresses her problems with her gender identity. Many of the poems and narratives refer to an unnamed "she" who represents the nameless female embodiment who serves no purpose.

In the Opening, a nameless she is at dinner with her family. In "Diseuse," another nameless she mimics speaking and allows others to occupy her. The narrator appeals



to the Muse to tell a story. In a church scene, a kneeling supplicating woman is contrasted with the priest who communicates with the He-God. This portion of the novel contains several allusions to the Virgin Mary, an indisputably honored woman. Clio is devoted primarily to Yu Guan Soon, a Korean revolutionary who died at age seventeen. Soon is compared to the men before her as making her duration complete. She appeals to Joan of Arc and Ahn Joong Kun. Soon's resistant group is not taken seriously by the national movement because of her status as a woman. She is the only daughter of four children. Cha praises Soon's bravery more so because she is a woman and must overcome many obstacles to present her bravery. In Calliope, Hyung Soon Huo is the only female teacher in the Manchurian village in six years which shows that women are less likely to be educated. In Melpomene, an unnamed she is silent, submissive and immobile. Cha joins the demonstration against the Civil War in Korea. "She" loses her name and becomes anonymous without the separate act of uttering.

In Erato, nearly all of the characters are unnamed "shes." One such "she" forms the words with her mouth though her femininity prevents her from speaking aloud. Her portrait is seen in her actions and belongings rather than through a photograph or painting. Husbands are permitted to be unfaithful by virtue of being men while women are objectified and owned by their husbands. The distance between a husband and wife is equivalent to the distance between Heaven and Hell. People ignore women's suffering by simply refusing to acknowledge it. Women are misunderstood on earth, but Jesus will not allow this to be their lot in Heaven. The mother nourishes the child and the husband. The wife takes what her husband gives because he gives so little; she deserves so little because she is a woman. She dares to name herself as if she possesses her own will, incurring her husband's mockery. Her body disappears and decomposes to become her husband's. In Thalia, she can no longer bare the silence. A crazy woman finds comfort in her pen which can give her a voice. In Terpsichore, the woman loses her name. In Polymnia, the young girl begins silently and speaks unwittingly. Ying and Yang, the epitome of the male and female as equal, is second only to the creation of the universe. The child needs help to be able to see through the window; this is a symbol of escaping from the bonds of society.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of "Dictee" alternates between being third person and first person. Sometimes, the narrator speaks of events from a third person perspective, especially referring to the actions of an unnamed "she," but at other times, she describes the events in which she participates from a first person point of view. Both points of view are omniscient and reliable as demonstrated by the fact that she knows the thoughts and feelings of all of the characters within the book. This is important since "Dictee" does not contain dialogue; therefore, without the narrator's omniscience, the reader would be completely unaware of how the various characters think.

This book is written completely in exposition with absolutely no dialogue. This unusual method is used before one of the main themes of this book is the oppression and objectification of women. To emphasize this theme, the struggle to speak is another important motif that shows the way that women are treated and expected to behave. The lack of dialogue in "Dictee" enforces this silence by portraying many unnamed women without a voice. The viewpoint within this book varies between Cha and unnamed women. By appealing to the Muses, Cha invokes the presence of a Western female literary tradition.

Setting

"Dictee" is set in the world, primarily in the Eastern Hemisphere which contains Asia, during the first half of the twentieth century. This atmosphere is one which is made of oppression and violence as detailed by the subjection of women to men and the wars that cause many Koreans to be exiled from their homes due to the occupation of Japan within Korea. The violent and oppressive nature of war is highlighted by the prohibition on Koreans to speak their native tongue; they are forced to speak Japanese upon penalty of death. Many of the poems and narratives within this collection do not specify the setting in which they occur, but one can assume that they are also set primarily in the Eastern Hemisphere as are the pieces that provide detailed settings.

One of the specific settings in "Dictee" is Korea. Korea is occupied by Japan under the false pretense of a treaty of alliance. This creates the exile of many Koreans, forcing other portions of "Dictee" to be set in Manchuria, China and the United States of America. The narratives about Yu Guan Soon are set in Korea as she is a Korean revolutionary who fights to free Korea from Japan's oppression. Calliope is set in Manchuria since Hyung Soon Huo's parents are exiled from Korea due to Japan's occupation of their native country. Cha, the author and narrator of "Dictee," recounts relocating to the United States of America as a refuge from the war in Korea.



Language and Meaning

The language of this book tends to be casual and informal. The sentences are frequently constructed in fragments that do not emulate proper writing. The language also tends to be vague and repetitive. At times, the language used in "Dictee" can hinder comprehension of the meaning behind the words; however, the language is meant to emphasize the confusion of certain times as well as the repetition of certain events, such as the suppression of women's speech and their painful struggle to evoke the words that allow them more freedom.

The language of the novel seems to emphasize the different cultures present in "Dictee," as well as the oppressive forces that subsist within Korea, both by the influence of Japan and men. The narratives and poems are all presented through exposition so dialogue is not present to distinguish characters; this is accomplished solely by the narrator's descriptions. Cha presents a highly subject view of heritage and the past which focuses on the struggle to overcome oppression, both as a nation and as a gender. The totality of the language often makes it difficult to understand, but an extensive reading is worthwhile as Cha's ideas become more clear through repetition.

Structure

"Dictee" is composed of an opening and nine subsequent sections, varying between thirteen and twenty-nine pages long. The opening appeals to the Muse to tell a story, and the nine remaining sections are titled to reflect the names of the nine ancient Greek Muses. The sections are also subtitled to allude to the aspects of art that the Muses were specifically said to be the Muse of. Each section is organized to contain stories and poems which refer to the title and subtitle of the section. "Dictee" is interspersed with photographs, drawings and diagrams throughout its pages.

Each section encompasses a general theme, but each story or poem contains its own specific plot. Despite this, some prevalent plots are the struggle to speak, Japan's oppression of Korea and religion. The pace of "Dictee" tends to be slow since there is a lot of description and repetition. The book is written solely using exposition and contains many flashbacks within individual pieces and sections. Although "Dictee" is very interesting, the book is quite difficult to comprehend and may require several readings before one is able to grasp the concepts that Cha presents within its pages.



Quotes

"It murmurs inside. It murmurs. Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say. Larger still. Greater than is the pain not to say. To not say. Says nothing against the pain to speak. It festers inside. The wound, liquid, dust. Must break. Must void." Opening, page 3

"Inside her voids. It does not contain further. Rising from the empty below, pebble lumps of gas. Moisture. Begin to flood her. Dissolving her. Slow, slowed to deliberation. Slow and thick." Opening, page 5

"O Muse, tell me the story Of all these things, O Goddess, daughter of Zeus Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us." Opening, page 7

"Be industrious: the more one works, the better one succeeds. The harder the task, the more honorable the labor. The more a man praises himself, the less inclined are others to praise him." Opening, page 8

"Black ash from the Palm Hosannah. Ash. Kneel down on the marble the cold beneath rising through the bent knees. Close eyes and as the lids flutter, push out the tongue. The Host Wafer (His Body. His Blood.) His. Dissolving in the mouth to the liquid tongue saliva (Wine to Blood. Bread to Flesh.) His. Open the eyes to the women kneeling on the left side. The right side. Only visible on their bleached countenances are the unevenly lit circles of rouge and their elongated tongues. In waiting. To receive. Him." Opening, page 13

"Truth embraces with it all other abstentions other than itself. Outside Time. Outside Space. Parallels other durations, oblivious to the deliberate brilliance of its own time, mortal, deliberate marking. Oblivious to itself. But to sing. To sing to. Very softly." Clio, page 28

"To the other nations who are not witnesses, who are not subject to the same oppressions, they cannot know. Unfathomable the words, the terminology: enemy, atrocities, conquest, betrayal, invasion, destruction. They exist only in the larger perception of History's recoring, that affirmed, admittedly and unmistakably, one enemy nation has disregarded the humanity of another. Not physical enough. Not to the very flesh and bone, to the core, to the mark, to the point where it is necessary to intervene, even if to invent anew, expressions, for this experience, for this outcome, that does not cease to continue. To the others, these accounts are about (one more) distant land, like (any other) distant land, without any discernible features in the narrative, (all the same) distant like any other." Clio, pages 32-33

"We can scarcely believe that the Japanese Government approves the outrages committed by its people in Korea, but it has done nothing to prevent this state of affairs. They have been, during the last eighteen months, forcibly obtaining all the special privileges and concessions from our Government, so that to-day they practically own everything that is worth having in Korea." Clio, page 35



"Some will not know age. Some not age. Time stops. Time will stop for some. For them especially. Eternal time. No age. Time fixes for some. Their image, the memory of them is not given to deterioration, unlike the captured image that extracts from the soul precisely by reproducing, multiplying itself. Their countenance evokes not the hallowed beauty, beauty from seasonal decay, evokes not the inevitable, not death, but the dying." Clio, page 37

"The decapitated forms. Worn. Marred, recording a past, of previous forms. The present form face to face reveals the missing, the absent. Would-be-said remnant, memory. But the remnant is the whole. The memory is the entire. The longing in the face of the lost. Maintains the missing. Fixed between the wax and wane indefinite not a sign of progress. All else age, in time. Except. Some are without." Clio, page 38

"Mother, you are eighteen years old. You were born in Yong Jung, Manchuria and this is where you now live. You are not Chinese. You are Korean. But your family moved here to escape the Japanese occupation. China is large. Larger than large. You tell me that the hearts of the people are measured by the size of the land. As large and as silent. You live in a village where the other Koreans live. Same as you. Refugees. Immigrants. Exiles. Farther away from the land that is not your own. Not your own any longer. You did not want to see. You cannot see anymore. What they do. To the land and to the people. As long as the land is not your own. Until it will be again." Calliope, page 45

"Still, you speak the tongue the mandatory language like the others. It is not your own. Even if it is not you know you must. You are Bi-lingual. You are Tri-lingual. The tongue that is forbidden is your own mother tongue. You speak in the dark. In the secret. The one that is yours. Your own. You speak very softly, you speak in a whisper. In the dark, in secret. Mother tongue is your refuge." Calliope, page 45

"You are home now your mother your home. Mother inseparable from which is her identity, her presence. Longing to breather the same air her hand no more a hand than instrument broken weathered no death takes them. No death will take them, Mother, I dream you just to be able to see you." Calliope, page 49

"No more sentence to exile, Mother, no black crows to mourn you. Neither takes you neither will take you Heaven nor Hell they fall too near you let them fall to each other you come back you come back to your one mother to your one father." Calliope, page 53

"I have the documents. Documents, proof, evidence, photograph, signature. One day your raise the right hand and you are American. They give you an American Pass port. The United States of America. Somewhere someone has taken my identity and replaced it with their photograph. The other one. Their signature their seals. Their own image. And you learn the executive branch the legislative branch and the third. Justice. Judicial branch. It makes the difference. The rest is past." Calliope, page 56



"You open your mouth half way. Near tears, nearly saying, I know you I know you, I have waited to see you for long this long. They check each article, question you on foreign articles, then dismiss you." Calliope, page 58

"Should it appear should it happen to appear all of a sudden, suddenly, begin to flow begin to collect begin to spill over flow flood should it happen to." Urania, page 64

"There is no destination other than towards yet another refuge from yet another war. Many generations pass and many deceptions in the sequence in the chronology towards the destination." Melpomene, page 80

"From another epic another history. From the missing narrative. From the multitude of narratives. Missing. From the chronicles. For another telling for other recitations." Melpomene, page 81

"There is no surrendering you are chosen to fail to be martyred to shed blood to be set an example one who has defied one who has chosen to defy and was to be set an example to be martyred an animal useless betrayer to the cause to the welfare to peace to harmony to progress." Melpomene, page 83

"The police the soldiers anonymous they duplicate themselves, multiply in number invincible they execute their role. Further than their home further than their mother father their brother sister further than their children is the execution of their role their given identity further than their own line of blood." Melpomene, page 84

"Columns. White. Stone. Abrasive and worn. Whiteness of the screen. Takes her backwards. Drawn to the white, then the black. The shadows moving across the whiteness, dark shapes and dark light." Erato, page 95

"One expects her to be beautiful. The title which carries her name is not one that would make her anonymous or plain. 'The portrait of...' One seems to be able to see her. One imagines her, already. Already before the title. She is not seen right away. Her image, yet anonymous suspends in one's mind." Erato, page 98

"He is the husband, and she is the wife. He is the man. She is the wife. It is a given. He does as he is the man. She does as she is the woman, and the wife. Stands the distance between husband and wife the distance of heaven and hell. The husband is seen. Entering the house shouting her name, calling her name. You find her for the first time as he enters the room calling her. You only hear him taunting and humiliating her. She kneels beside him, putting on his clothes for him. She takes her place. It is a given." Erato, page 102

"You know how it was. Same. For her. She would do the same. She would sit at the piano as her sadness grew in her breath without any destination. She would set before each note until the music would induce her and she would acquiesce. From the other room you knew as she would begin playing. You walk inside the room, you sit behind her you knew the music, which ones." Erato, page 108



"Mother you who take the child from your back to your breast you who unbare your breast to the child her hunger is your own the child takes away your pain with her nourishment." Erato, page 109

"Perhaps she loved him. Her husband. Perhaps after all she did. Perhaps in the beginning it was not this way. In the beginning it was different. Perhaps she loved him in spite of. In spite of the arrangement that she was to be come his wife. A stranger. Stranger to her. The one that she should espouse. Decided for her. Now she would be long to him. Perhaps she learned to love him. Perhaps it was never a question. It was a given. She took whatever he would give her because he gave her so little. She takes she took them without previous knowledge of how it was supposed to be how it is supposed to be. She deserved so little. Being wife. How it was. How it had been. Being woman. Never to question. Never to expect but the given. Only the given. She was his wife his possession she belonged to him her husband the man who claimed her and she could not refuse. Perhaps that was how it was. That was how it was then. Perhaps now." Erato, page 110 and 112

"I am only a child, powerless and weak, and yet it is my weaknesses that gives me the boldness of offering myself as VICTIM of your love, O Jesus! In times past, victims, pure and spotless, were the only ones accepted by the Strong and Powerful God. To satisfy Divine Justice, perfect victims were necessary, but the Law of Love has succeeded to the law of fear, and Love has chosen me as a holocaust, me, a weak and imperfect creature. Is not this choice worthy of Love? Yes, in order that Love be fully satisfied, it is necessary that It lower itself, and that It lower Itself to nothingness and transform this nothingness into fire. O Jesus, I know it, love is repaid by love alone, and so I searched and I found the way to solace my heart by giving you Love for Love." Erato, page 111

"The smallest act of PURE LOVE is of more value to her than all other works together." Erato, page 115

"In the whiteness no distinction her body invariable no dissonance synonymous her body all the time de composes eclipses to be come yours." Erato, page 118

"Dead time. Hollow depression interred invalid to resurgence, resistant to memory. Waits. Apel. Apellation. Excavation. Let the one who is disease. Disease de bonne aventure. Let her call forth. Let her break open the spell cast upon time upon time again and again. With her voice, penetrate earth's floor, the walls of Tartarus to circle and scratch the bowl's surface. Let the sound enter from without, the bowl's hollow its sleep. Until." Elitere, page 123

"Make numb some vision some word some part resembling part something else pretend not to see pretend not having seen the part. That part the only part too clear was all of it was the first to be seen but pretend it wasn't. Nothing at all. It seemed to resemble but it wasn't." Elitere, page 128

"Dead gods. Forgotten. Obsolete. Past Dust the exposed layer and reveal the unfathomable well beneath. Dead time. Dead gods. Sediment. Turned stone. Let the



one who is disease dust breathe away the distance of the well. Let the one who is disease again sit upon the stone nine days and nine nights. Thus. Making stand again, Eleusis." Elitere, page 130

"Dead words. Dead tongue. From disuse. Buried in Time's memory. Unemployed. Unspoken. History. Past. Let the one who is disease, one who is mother who waits nine days and nine nights be found. Restore memory. Let the one who is disease, one who is daughter restore spring with her each appearance from beneath the earth. The ink spills thickest before it runs dry before it stops writing at all." Elitere, page 133

"She is the first to announce her arrival. Voice of anticipation. She wishes that it would metamorphose the other. The voice alone, by its force by its pleading by some inexplicable power. Of wishing. Wishing hard enough. She wishes that this person would be metamorphosed back into the person that was previously, she prays, invents, if it is necessary." Thalia, page 139

"She says to herself if she were able to write she would continue to live. Says to herself if she would write without ceasing. To herself if by writing she could abolish real time. She would live. If she could display it before her and becomes its voyeur." Thalia, page 141

"She is standing at the doorway. Now she is left to wait at the gate entry outside, the man has disappeared, she caresses the door she leans against the door as she would, her back against the day, the folly." Thalia, page 143

"Without a doubt she knows. She knows all along. How it is not easily believed. By her. By her even. Without a doubt she knows what she must say. All along. Even though. Not easily believed. Without a doubt the uncertainty of having said them bordering on regret without a doubt the wish to retrieve them if she had regretted them afterwards all along." Thalia, page 150

"Before Heaven. Before birth and before that. Heaven which in its ultimate unity includes earth within itself. Heaven in its ultimate generosity includes within itself, Earth. Heaven which is not Heaven without Earth (inside itself)." Thalia, page 150-151

"You remain dismembered with the belief that magnolia blooms white even on seemingly dead branches and you wait. You remain apart from the congregation." Terpischore, page 155

"All. This. Time. To pronounce without prescribing purpose. It prescribes nothing. The time thought to have fixed, dead, reveals the very rate of the very movement. Velocity. Lentitude. Of its own larger time." Terpischore, page 157

"Maimed. Accident. Stutters. Almost a name. Half a name. Almost a place. Starts. About to. Then stops. Exhale swallowed to a sudden arrest. Pauses. How vast this page. Stillness, the page. Without. Can do without rests. Pause. Without them. All. Stop start." Terpischore, page 159



"Cling. Cling more. At the sigh of. At last in sight at last. Cleared for the sighting. So clear cling so fast cling fast at the site. Clear and clearer. Hours day sheet by sheet one pile. Next pile. Then the next from one pile to the next pile. One sheet below the crack of closed door slide piled up on the other side no overlapping. One at a time. One sheet. End in sight. With accumulation. Without prosper." Terpischore, page 159-160

"From stone. A single stone. Column. Carved on one stone, the labor of figures. The labor of tongues. Inscribed to stone. The labor of voices." Terpischore, page 161

"She heard faintly the young girl uttering a sequence of words, and interspersed between them, equal duration of pauses. Her mouth is left open at the last word. She does not seem to realize that she had spoken." Polymnia, page 168

"She began walking very rapidly. Her steps seemed to move lighter than before. After a while she turned around to wave to the young woman at the well. She had already left the well. She turned and looked in all directions but she was not anywhere to be seen. She remembered her words about stopping on her way and she started to run." Polymnia, page 170

"Words cast each by each to weather avowed indisputably, to time. If it should impress, make fossil trace of word, residue of word, stand as a ruin stands, simply as mark having relinquished itself to time to distance" Polymnia, page 177

"In vigilance of lifting the immobile silence. Lift me to the window to the picture image unleash the ropes tied to weights of stones first the ropes then its scraping on wood to break stillness as the bells fall peal follow the sound of ropes holding weight scraping on wood to break stillness bells fall a peal to sky." Polymnia, page 179



Topics for Discussion

How does the author feel about war?

Describe one instance in the book that indicates the author is feminist.

The book talks about several women. Choose two of these women to compare and contrast.

How is exile described in this book, and what examples are provided of exile?

Compare and contrast writing and speech, as indicated by Cha in "Dictee."

What is the significance of the way that "Dictee" is divided?

Why are the photographs and drawings important to the message of "Dictee?"